

## CHAPTER FOUR--ANTHONY AND FLORA

Marlow emerged out of the shadow of the book-case to get himself a cigar from a box which stood on a little table by my side. In the full light of the room I saw in his eyes that slightly mocking expression with which he habitually covers up his sympathetic impulses of mirth and pity before the unreasonable complications the idealism of mankind puts into the simple but poignant problem of conduct on this earth.

He selected and lit the cigar with affected care, then turned upon me, I had been looking at him silently.

"I suppose," he said, the mockery of his eyes giving a pellucid quality to his tone, "that you think it's high time I told you something definite. I mean something about that psychological cabin mystery of discomfort (for it's obvious that it must be psychological) which affected so profoundly Mr. Franklin the chief mate, and had even disturbed the serene innocence of Mr. Powell, the second of the ship *Ferndale*, commanded by Roderick Anthony--the son of the poet, you know."

"You are going to confess now that you have failed to find it out," I said in pretended indignation.

"It would serve you right if I told you that I have. But I won't. I haven't failed. I own though that for a time, I was puzzled. However, I have now seen our Powell many times under the most favourable conditions--and besides I came upon a most unexpected source of information . . . But never mind that. The means don't concern you except in so far as they belong to the story. I'll admit that for some time the old-maiden-lady-like occupation of putting two and two together failed to procure a coherent theory. I am speaking now as an investigator--a man of deductions. With what we know of Roderick Anthony and Flora de Barral I could not deduct an ordinary marital quarrel beautifully matured in less than a year--could I? If you ask me what is an ordinary marital quarrel I will tell you, that it is a difference about nothing; I mean, these nothings which, as Mr. Powell told us when we first met him, shore people are so prone to start a row about, and nurse into hatred from an idle sense of wrong, from perverted ambition, for spectacular reasons too. There are on earth no actors too humble and obscure not to have a gallery; that gallery which evenoms the play by stealthy jeers, counsels of anger, amused comments or words of perfidious compassion. However, the Anthonys were free from all demoralizing influences. At sea, you know, there is no gallery. You hear no tormenting echoes of your own littleness there, where either a great elemental voice roars defiantly under the sky or else

an elemental silence seems to be part of the infinite stillness of the universe.

Remembering Flora de Barral in the depths of moral misery, and Roderick Anthony carried away by a gust of tempestuous tenderness, I asked myself, Is it all forgotten already? What could they have found to estrange them from each other with this rapidity and this thoroughness so far from all temptations, in the peace of the sea and in an isolation so complete that if it had not been the jealous devotion of the sentimental Franklin stimulating the attention of Powell, there would have been no record, no evidence of it at all.

I must confess at once that it was Flora de Barral whom I suspected. In this world as at present organized women are the suspected half of the population. There are good reasons for that. These reasons are so discoverable with a little reflection that it is not worth my while to set them out for you. I will only mention this: that the part falling to women's share being all "influence" has an air of occult and mysterious action, something not altogether trustworthy like all natural forces which, for us, work in the dark because of our imperfect comprehension.

If women were not a force of nature, blind in its strength and capricious in its power, they would not be mistrusted. As it is one can't help it. You will say that this force having been in the person of Flora de Barral captured by Anthony . . . Why yes. He had dealt with her masterfully. But man has captured electricity too. It lights him on his way, it warms his home, it will even cook his dinner for him--very much like a woman. But what sort of conquest would you call it? He knows nothing of it. He has got to be mighty careful what he is about with his captive. And the greater the demand he makes on it in the exultation of his pride the more likely it is to turn on him and burn him to a cinder . . . "

"A far-fetched enough parallel," I observed coldly to Marlow. He had returned to the arm-chair in the shadow of the bookcase. "But accepting the meaning you have in your mind it reduces itself to the knowledge of how to use it. And if you mean that this ravenous Anthony--"

"Ravenous is good," interrupted Marlow. "He was a-hungering and a-thirsting for femininity to enter his life in a way no mere feminist could have the slightest conception of. I reckon that this accounts for much of Fyne's disgust with him. Good little Fyne. You have no idea what infernal mischief he had worked during his call at the hotel. But then who could have suspected Anthony of being a heroic creature. There are several kinds of heroism and one of them at least is idiotic. It is the one which wears the aspect of sublime delicacy. It is apparently the one of which the son of the delicate poet was capable.

He certainly resembled his father, who, by the way, wore out two women without any satisfaction to himself, because they did not come up to his supra-refined standard of the delicacy which is so perceptible in his verses. That's your poet. He demands too much from others. The inarticulate son had set up a standard for himself with that need for embodying in his conduct the dreams, the passion, the impulses the poet puts into arrangements of verses, which are dearer to him than his own self--and may make his own self appear sublime in the eyes of other people, and even in his own eyes.

Did Anthony wish to appear sublime in his own eyes? I should not like to make that charge; though indeed there are other, less noble, ambitions at which the world does not dare to smile. But I don't think so; I do not even think that there was in what he did a conscious and lofty confidence in himself, a particularly pronounced sense of power which leads men so often into impossible or equivocal situations. Looked at abstractedly (the way in which truth is often seen in its real shape) his life had been a life of solitude and silence--and desire.

Chance had thrown that girl in his way; and if we may smile at his violent conquest of Flora de Barral we must admit also that this eager appropriation was truly the act of a man of solitude and desire; a man also, who, unless a complete imbecile, must have been a man of long and ardent reveries wherein the faculty of sincere passion matures slowly in the unexplored recesses of the heart. And I know also that a passion, dominating or tyrannical, invading the whole man and subjugating all his faculties to its own unique end, may conduct him whom it spurs and drives, into all sorts of adventures, to the brink of unfathomable dangers, to the limits of folly, and madness, and death.

To the man then of a silence made only more impressive by the inarticulate thunders and mutters of the great seas, an utter stranger to the clatter of tongues, there comes the muscular little Fyne, the most marked representative of that mankind whose voice is so strange to him, the husband of his sister, a personality standing out from the misty and remote multitude. He comes and throws at him more talk than he had ever heard boomed out in an hour, and certainly touching the deepest things Anthony had ever discovered in himself, and flings words like "unfair" whose very sound is abhorrent to him. Unfair! Undue advantage! He! Unfair to that girl? Cruel to her!

No scorn could stand against the impression of such charges advanced with heat and conviction. They shook him. They were yet vibrating in the air of that stuffy hotel-room, terrific, disturbing, impossible to get rid of, when the door opened and Flora de Barral entered.

He did not even notice that she was late. He was sitting on a sofa plunged in

gloom. Was it true? Having himself always said exactly what he meant he imagined that people (unless they were liars, which of course his brother-in-law could not be) never said more than they meant. The deep chest voice of little Fyne was still in his ear. "He knows," Anthony said to himself. He thought he had better go away and never see her again. But she stood there before him accusing and appealing. How could he abandon her? That was out of the question. She had no one. Or rather she had someone. That father. Anthony was willing to take him at her valuation. This father may have been the victim of the most atrocious injustice. But what could a man coming out of jail do? An old man too. And then--what sort of man? What would become of them both? Anthony shuddered slightly and the faint smile with which Flora had entered the room faded on her lips. She was used to his impetuous tenderness. She was no longer afraid of it. But she had never seen him look like this before, and she suspected at once some new cruelty of life. He got up with his usual ardour but as if sobered by a momentous resolve and said:

"No. I can't let you out of my sight. I have seen you. You have told me your story. You are honest. You have never told me you loved me."

She waited, saying to herself that he had never given her time, that he had never asked her! And that, in truth, she did not know!

I am inclined to believe that she did not. As abundance of experience is not precisely her lot in life, a woman is seldom an expert in matters of sentiment. It is the man who can and generally does "see himself" pretty well inside and out. Women's self-possession is an outward thing; inwardly they flutter, perhaps because they are, or they feel themselves to be, engaged. All this speaking generally. In Flora de Barral's particular case ever since Anthony had suddenly broken his way into her hopeless and cruel existence she lived like a person liberated from a condemned cell by a natural cataclysm, a tempest, an earthquake; not absolutely terrified, because nothing can be worse than the eve of execution, but stunned, bewildered--abandoning herself passively. She did not want to make a sound, to move a limb. She hadn't the strength. What was the good? And deep down, almost unconsciously she was seduced by the feeling of being supported by this violence. A sensation she had never experienced before in her life.

She felt as if this whirlwind were calming down somehow! As if this feeling of support, which was tempting her to close her eyes deliciously and let herself be carried on and on into the unknown undefiled by vile experiences, were less certain, had wavered threateningly. She tried to read something in his face, in that energetic kindly face to which she had become accustomed so soon. But she was not yet capable of understanding its expression. Scared, discouraged on the

threshold of adolescence, plunged in moral misery of the bitterest kind, she had not learned to read--not that sort of language.

If Anthony's love had been as egoistic as love generally is, it would have been greater than the egoism of his vanity--or of his generosity, if you like--and all this could not have happened. He would not have hit upon that renunciation at which one does not know whether to grin or shudder. It is true too that then his love would not have fastened itself upon the unhappy daughter of de Barral. But it was a love born of that rare pity which is not akin to contempt because rooted in an overwhelmingly strong capacity for tenderness--the tenderness of the fiery kind--the tenderness of silent solitary men, the voluntary, passionate outcasts of their kind. At the time I am forced to think that his vanity must have been enormous.

"What big eyes she has," he said to himself amazed. No wonder. She was staring at him with all the might of her soul awakening slowly from a poisoned sleep, in which it could only quiver with pain but could neither expand nor move. He plunged into them breathless and tense, deep, deep, like a mad sailor taking a desperate dive from the masthead into the blue unfathomable sea so many men have execrated and loved at the same time. And his vanity was immense. It had been touched to the quick by that muscular little feminist, Fyne. "I! I! Take advantage of her helplessness. I! Unfair to that creature--that wisp of mist, that white shadow homeless in an ugly dirty world. I could blow her away with a breath," he was saying to himself with horror. "Never!" All the supremely refined delicacy of tenderness, expressed in so many fine lines of verse by Carleon Anthony, grew to the size of a passion filling with inward sobs the big frame of the man who had never in his life read a single one of those famous sonnets singing of the most highly civilized, chivalrous love, of those sonnets which . . . You know there's a volume of them. My edition has the portrait of the author at thirty, and when I showed it to Mr. Powell the other day he exclaimed: "Wonderful! One would think this the portrait of Captain Anthony himself if . . ." I wanted to know what that if was. But Powell could not say. There was something--a difference. No doubt there was--in fineness perhaps. The father, fastidious, cerebral, morbidly shrinking from all contacts, could only sing in harmonious numbers of what the son felt with a dumb and reckless sincerity.

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Possessed by most strong men's touching illusion as to the frailness of women and their spiritual fragility, it seemed to Anthony that he would be destroying, breaking something very precious inside that being. In fact nothing less than partly murdering her. This seems a very extreme effect to flow from Fyne's words. But Anthony, unaccustomed to the chatter of the firm earth, never stayed to ask

himself what value these words could have in Fyne's mouth. And indeed the mere dark sound of them was utterly abhorrent to his native rectitude, sea-salted, hardened in the winds of wide horizons, open as the day.

He wished to blurt out his indignation but she regarded him with an expectant air which checked him. His visible discomfort made her uneasy. He could only repeat "Oh yes. You are perfectly honest. You might have, but I dare say you are right. At any rate you have never said anything to me which you didn't mean."

"Never," she whispered after a pause.

He seemed distracted, choking with an emotion she could not understand because it resembled embarrassment, a state of mind inconceivable in that man.

She wondered what it was she had said; remembering that in very truth she had hardly spoken to him except when giving him the bare outline of her story which he seemed to have hardly had the patience to hear, waving it perpetually aside with exclamations of horror and anger, with fiercely sombre mutters "Enough! Enough!" and with alarming starts from a forced stillness, as though he meant to rush out at once and take vengeance on somebody. She was saying to herself that he caught her words in the air, never letting her finish her thought. Honest. Honest. Yes certainly she had been that. Her letter to Mrs. Fyne had been prompted by honesty. But she reflected sadly that she had never known what to say to him. That perhaps she had nothing to say.

"But you'll find out that I can be honest too," he burst out in a menacing tone, she had learned to appreciate with an amused thrill.

She waited for what was coming. But he hung in the wind. He looked round the room with disgust as if he could see traces on the walls of all the casual tenants that had ever passed through it. People had quarrelled in that room; they had been ill in it, there had been misery in that room, wickedness, crime perhaps--death most likely. This was not a fit place. He snatched up his hat. He had made up his mind. The ship--the ship he had known ever since she came off the stocks, his home--her shelter--the uncontaminated, honest ship, was the place.

"Let us go on board. We'll talk there," he said. "And you will have to listen to me. For whatever happens, no matter what they say, I cannot let you go."

You can't say that (misgivings or no misgivings) she could have done anything else but go on board. It was the appointed business of that morning. During the drive he was silent. Anthony was the last man to condemn conventionally any human being, to scorn and despise even deserved misfortune. He was ready to

take old de Barral--the convict--on his daughter's valuation without the slightest reserve. But love like his, though it may drive one into risky folly by the proud consciousness of its own strength, has a sagacity of its own. And now, as if lifted up into a higher and serene region by its purpose of renunciation, it gave him leisure to reflect for the first time in these last few days. He said to himself: "I don't know that man. She does not know him either. She was barely sixteen when they locked him up. She was a child. What will he say? What will he do? No, he concluded, I cannot leave her behind with that man who would come into the world as if out of a grave.

They went on board in silence, and it was after showing her round and when they had returned to the saloon that he assailed her in his fiery, masterful fashion. At first she did not understand. Then when she understood that he was giving her her liberty she went stiff all over, her hand resting on the edge of the table, her face set like a carving of white marble. It was all over. It was as that abominable governess had said. She was insignificant, contemptible. Nobody could love her. Humiliation clung to her like a cold shroud--never to be shaken off, unwarmed by this madness of generosity.

"Yes. Here. Your home. I can't give it to you and go away, but it is big enough for us two. You need not be afraid. If you say so I shall not even look at you. Remember that grey head of which you have been thinking night and day. Where is it going to rest? Where else if not here, where nothing evil can touch it. Don't you understand that I won't let you buy shelter from me at the cost of your very soul. I won't. You are too much part of me. I have found myself since I came upon you and I would rather sell my own soul to the devil than let you go out of my keeping. But I must have the right."

He went away brusquely to shut the door leading on deck and came back the whole length of the cabin repeating:

"I must have the legal right. Are you ashamed of letting people think you are my wife?"

He opened his arms as if to clasp her to his breast but mastered the impulse and shook his clenched hands at her, repeating: "I must have the right if only for your father's sake. I must have the right. Where would you take him? To that infernal cardboard box-maker. I don't know what keeps me from hunting him up in his virtuous home and bashing his head in. I can't bear the thought. Listen to me, Flora! Do you hear what I am saying to you? You are not so proud that you can't understand that I as a man have my pride too?"

He saw a tear glide down her white cheek from under each lowered eyelid. Then,

abruptly, she walked out of the cabin. He stood for a moment, concentrated, reckoning his own strength, interrogating his heart, before he followed her hastily. Already she had reached the wharf.

At the sound of his pursuing footsteps her strength failed her. Where could she escape from this? From this new perfidy of life taking upon itself the form of magnanimity. His very voice was changed. The sustaining whirlwind had let her down, to stumble on again, weakened by the fresh stab, bereft of moral support which is wanted in life more than all the charities of material help. She had never had it. Never. Not from the Fynes. But where to go? Oh yes, this dock--a placid sheet of water close at hand. But there was that old man with whom she had walked hand in hand on the parade by the sea. She seemed to see him coming to meet her, pitiful, a little greyer, with an appealing look and an extended, tremulous arm. It was for her now to take the hand of that wronged man more helpless than a child. But where could she lead him? Where? And what was she to say to him? What words of cheer, of courage and of hope? There were none. Heaven and earth were mute, unconcerned at their meeting. But this other man was coming up behind her. He was very close now. His fiery person seemed to radiate heat, a tingling vibration into the atmosphere. She was exhausted, careless, afraid to stumble, ready to fall. She fancied she could hear his breathing. A wave of languid warmth overtook her, she seemed to lose touch with the ground under her feet; and when she felt him slip his hand under her arm she made no attempt to disengage herself from that grasp which closed upon her limb, insinuating and firm.

He conducted her through the dangers of the quayside. Her sight was dim. A moving truck was like a mountain gliding by. Men passed by as if in a mist; and the buildings, the sheds, the unexpected open spaces, the ships, had strange, distorted, dangerous shapes. She said to herself that it was good not to be bothered with what all these things meant in the scheme of creation (if indeed anything had a meaning), or were just piled-up matter without any sense. She felt how she had always been unrelated to this world. She was hanging on to it merely by that one arm grasped firmly just above the elbow. It was a captivity. So be it. Till they got out into the street and saw the hansom waiting outside the gates Anthony spoke only once, beginning brusquely but in a much gentler tone than she had ever heard from his lips.

"Of course I ought to have known that you could not care for a man like me, a stranger. Silence gives consent. Yes? Eh? I don't want any of that sort of consent. And unless some day you find you can speak . . . No! No! I shall never ask you. For all the sign I will give you you may go to your grave with sealed lips. But what I have said you must do!"



He bent his head over her with tender care. At the same time she felt her arm pressed and shaken inconspicuously, but in an undeniable manner. "You must do it." A little shake that no passer-by could notice; and this was going on in a deserted part of the dock. "It must be done. You are listening to me--eh? or would you go again to my sister?"

His ironic tone, perhaps from want of use, had an awful grating ferocity.

"Would you go to her?" he pursued in the same strange voice. "Your best friend! And say nicely--I am sorry. Would you? No! You couldn't. There are things that even you, poor dear lost girl, couldn't stand. Eh? Die rather. That's it. Of course. Or can you be thinking of taking your father to that infernal cousin's house. No! Don't speak. I can't bear to think of it. I would follow you there and smash the door!"

The catch in his voice astonished her by its resemblance to a sob. It frightened her too. The thought that came to her head was: "He mustn't." He was putting her into the hansom. "Oh! He mustn't, he mustn't." She was still more frightened by the discovery that he was shaking all over. Bewildered, shrinking into the far off corner, avoiding his eyes, she yet saw the quivering of his mouth and made a wild attempt at a smile, which broke the rigidity of her lips and set her teeth chattering suddenly.

"I am not coming with you," he was saying. "I'll tell the man . . . I can't. Better not. What is it? Are you cold? Come! What is it? Only to go to a confounded stuffy room, a hole of an office. Not a quarter of an hour. I'll come for you--in ten days. Don't think of it too much. Think of no man, woman or child of all that silly crowd cumbering the ground. Don't think of me either. Think of yourself. Ha! Nothing will be able to touch you then--at last. Say nothing. Don't move. I'll have everything arranged; and as long as you don't hate the sight of me--and you don't--there's nothing to be frightened about. One of their silly offices with a couple of ink-slingers of no consequence; poor, scribbling devils."

The hansom drove away with Flora de Barral inside, without movement, without thought, only too glad to rest, to be alone and still moving away without effort, in solitude and silence.

Anthony roamed the streets for hours without being able to remember in the evening where he had been--in the manner of a happy and exulting lover. But nobody could have thought so from his face, which bore no signs of blissful anticipation. Exulting indeed he was but it was a special sort of exultation which seemed to take him by the throat like an enemy.

Anthony's last words to Flora referred to the registry office where they were married ten days later. During that time Anthony saw no one or anything, though he went about restlessly, here and there, amongst men and things. This special state is peculiar to common lovers, who are known to have no eyes for anything except for the contemplation, actual or inward, of one human form which for them contains the soul of the whole world in all its beauty, perfection, variety and infinity. It must be extremely pleasant. But felicity was denied to Roderick Anthony's contemplation. He was not a common sort of lover; and he was punished for it as if Nature (which it is said abhors a vacuum) were so very conventional as to abhor every sort of exceptional conduct. Roderick Anthony had begun already to suffer. That is why perhaps he was so industrious in going about amongst his fellowmen who would have been surprised and humiliated, had they known how little solidity and even existence they had in his eyes. But they could not suspect anything so queer. They saw nothing extraordinary in him during that fortnight. The proof of this is that they were willing to transact business with him. Obviously they were; since it is then that the offer of chartering his ship for the special purpose of proceeding to the Western Islands was put in his way by a firm of shipbrokers who had no doubt of his sanity.

He probably looked sane enough for all the practical purposes of commercial life. But I am not so certain that he really was quite sane at that time.

However, he jumped at the offer. Providence itself was offering him this opportunity to accustom the girl to sea-life by a comparatively short trip. This was the time when everything that happened, everything he heard, casual words, unrelated phrases, seemed a provocation or an encouragement, confirmed him in his resolution. And indeed to be busy with material affairs is the best preservative against reflection, fears, doubts--all these things which stand in the way of achievement. I suppose a fellow proposing to cut his throat would experience a sort of relief while occupied in stropping his razor carefully.

And Anthony was extremely careful in preparing for himself and for the luckless Flora, an impossible existence. He went about it with no more tremors than if he had been stuffed with rags or made of iron instead of flesh and blood. An existence, mind you, which, on shore, in the thick of mankind, of varied interests, of distractions, of infinite opportunities to preserve your distance from each other, is hardly conceivable; but on board ship, at sea, en tete-a-tete for days and weeks and months together, could mean nothing but mental torture, an exquisite absurdity of torment. He was a simple soul. His hopelessly masculine ingenuousness is displayed in a touching way by his care to procure some woman to attend on Flora. The condition of guaranteed perfect respectability gave him moments of anxious thought. When he remembered suddenly his steward's wife he must have exclaimed eureka with particular exultation. One does not like to

call Anthony an ass. But really to put any woman within scintillating distance of such a secret and suppose that she would not track it out!

No woman, however simple, could be as ingenuous as that. I don't know how Flora de Barral qualified him in her thoughts when he told her of having done this amongst other things intended to make her comfortable. I should think that, for all her simplicity, she must have been appalled. He stood before her on the appointed day outwardly calmer than she had ever seen him before. And this very calmness, that scrupulous attitude which he felt bound in honour to assume then and for ever, unless she would condescend to make a sign at some future time, added to the heaviness of her heart innocent of the most pardonable guile.

The night before she had slept better than she had done for the past ten nights. Both youth and weariness will assert themselves in the end against the tyranny of nerve-racking stress. She had slept but she woke up with her eyes full of tears. There were no traces of them when she met him in the shabby little parlour downstairs. She had swallowed them up. She was not going to let him see. She felt bound in honour to accept the situation for ever and ever unless . . . Ah, unless . . . She dissembled all her sentiments but it was not duplicity on her part. All she wanted was to get at the truth; to see what would come of it.

She beat him at his own honourable game and the thoroughness of her serenity disconcerted Anthony a bit. It was he who stammered when it came to talking. The suppressed fierceness of his character carried him on after the first word or two masterfully enough. But it was as if they both had taken a bite of the same bitter fruit. He was thinking with mournful regret not unmixed with surprise: "That fellow Fyne has been telling me the truth. She does not care for me a bit." It humiliated him and also increased his compassion for the girl who in this darkness of life, buffeted and despairing, had fallen into the grip of his stronger will, abandoning herself to his arms as on a night of shipwreck. Flora on her side with partial insight (for women are never blind with the complete masculine blindness) looked on him with some pity; and she felt pity for herself too. It was a rejection, a casting out; nothing new to her. But she who supposed all her sensibility dead by this time, discovered in herself a resentment of this ultimate betrayal. She had no resignation for this one. With a sort of mental sullenness she said to herself: "Well, I am here. I am here without any nonsense. It is not my fault that I am a mere worthless object of pity."

And these things which she could tell herself with a clear conscience served her better than the passionate obstinacy of purpose could serve Roderick Anthony. She was much more sure of herself than he was. Such are the advantages of mere rectitude over the most exalted generosity.

And so they went out to get married, the people of the house where she lodged having no suspicion of anything of the sort. They were only excited at a "gentleman friend" (a very fine man too) calling on Miss Smith for the first time since she had come to live in the house. When she returned, for she did come back alone, there were allusions made to that outing. She had to take her meals with these rather vulgar people. The woman of the house, a scraggy, genteel person, tried even to provoke confidences. Flora's white face with the deep blue eyes did not strike their hearts as it did the heart of Captain Anthony, as the very face of the suffering world. Her pained reserve had no power to awe them into decency.

Well, she returned alone--as in fact might have been expected. After leaving the Registry Office Flora de Barral and Roderick Anthony had gone for a walk in a park. It must have been an East-End park but I am not sure. Anyway that's what they did. It was a sunny day. He said to her: "Everything I have in the world belongs to you. I have seen to that without troubling my brother-in-law. They have no call to interfere."

She walked with her hand resting lightly on his arm. He had offered it to her on coming out of the Registry Office, and she had accepted it silently. Her head drooped, she seemed to be turning matters over in her mind. She said, alluding to the Fynes: "They have been very good to me." At that he exclaimed:

"They have never understood you. Well, not properly. My sister is not a bad woman, but . . . "

Flora didn't protest; asking herself whether he imagined that he himself understood her so much better. Anthony dismissing his family out of his thoughts went on: "Yes. Everything is yours. I have kept nothing back. As to the piece of paper we have just got from that miserable quill-driver if it wasn't for the law, I wouldn't mind if you tore it up here, now, on this spot. But don't you do it. Unless you should some day feel that--"

He choked, unexpectedly. She, reflective, hesitated a moment then making up her mind bravely.

"Neither am I keeping anything back from you."

She had said it! But he in his blind generosity assumed that she was alluding to her deplorable history and hastened to mutter:

"Of course! Of course! Say no more. I have been lying awake thinking of it all no end of times."

He made a movement with his other arm as if restraining himself from shaking an indignant fist at the universe; and she never even attempted to look at him. His voice sounded strangely, incredibly lifeless in comparison with these tempestuous accents that in the broad fields, in the dark garden had seemed to shake the very earth under her weary and hopeless feet.

She regretted them. Hearing the sigh which escaped her Anthony instead of shaking his fist at the universe began to pat her hand resting on his arm and then desisted, suddenly, as though he had burnt himself. Then after a silence:

"You will have to go by yourself to-morrow. I . . . No, I think I mustn't come. Better not. What you two will have to say to each other--"

She interrupted him quickly:

"Father is an innocent man. He was cruelly wronged."

"Yes. That's why," Anthony insisted earnestly. "And you are the only human being that can make it up to him. You alone must reconcile him with the world if anything can. But of course you shall. You'll have to find words. Oh you'll know. And then the sight of you, alone, would soothe--"

"He's the gentlest of men," she interrupted again.

Anthony shook his head. "It would take no end of generosity, no end of gentleness to forgive such a dead set. For my part I would have liked better to have been killed and done with at once. It could not have been worse for you-- and I suppose it was of you that he was thinking most while those infernal lawyers were badgering him in court. Of you. And now I think of it perhaps the sight of you may bring it all back to him. All these years, all these years--and you his child left alone in the world. I would have gone crazy. For even if he had done wrong--"

"But he hasn't," insisted Flora de Barral with a quite unexpected fierceness. "You mustn't even suppose it. Haven't you read the accounts of the trial?"

"I am not supposing anything," Anthony defended himself. He just remembered hearing of the trial. He assured her that he was away from England, the second voyage of the Ferndale. He was crossing the Pacific from Australia at the time and didn't see any papers for weeks and weeks. He interrupted himself to suggest:

"You had better tell him at once that you are happy."

He had stammered a little, and Flora de Barral uttered a deliberate and concise "Yes."

A short silence ensued. She withdrew her hand from his arm. They stopped. Anthony looked as if a totally unexpected catastrophe had happened.

"Ah," he said. "You mind . . ."

"No! I think I had better," she murmured.

"I dare say. I dare say. Bring him along straight on board to-morrow. Stop nowhere."

She had a movement of vague gratitude, a momentary feeling of peace which she referred to the man before her. She looked up at Anthony. His face was sombre. He was miles away and muttered as if to himself:

"Where could he want to stop though?"

"There's not a single being on earth that I would want to look at his dear face now, to whom I would willingly take him," she said extending her hand frankly and with a slight break in her voice, "but you--Roderick."

He took that hand, felt it very small and delicate in his broad palm.

"That's right. That's right," he said with a conscious and hasty heartiness and, as if suddenly ashamed of the sound of his voice, turned half round and absolutely walked away from the motionless girl. He even resisted the temptation to look back till it was too late. The gravel path lay empty to the very gate of the park. She was gone--vanished. He had an impression that he had missed some sort of chance. He felt sad. That excited sense of his own conduct which had kept him up for the last ten days buoyed him no more. He had succeeded!

He strolled on aimlessly a prey to gentle melancholy. He walked and walked. There were but few people about in this breathing space of a poor neighbourhood. Under certain conditions of life there is precious little time left for mere breathing. But still a few here and there were indulging in that luxury; yet few as they were Captain Anthony, though the least exclusive of men, resented their presence. Solitude had been his best friend. He wanted some place where he could sit down and be alone. And in his need his thoughts turned to the sea which had given him so much of that congenial solitude. There, if always with his ship (but

that was an integral part of him) he could always be as solitary as he chose. Yes. Get out to sea!

The night of the town with its strings of lights, rigid, and crossed like a net of flames, thrown over the sombre immensity of walls, closed round him, with its artificial brilliance overhung by an emphatic blackness, its unnatural animation of a restless, overdriven humanity. His thoughts which somehow were inclined to pity every passing figure, every single person glimpsed under a street lamp, fixed themselves at last upon a figure which certainly could not have been seen under the lamps on that particular night. A figure unknown to him. A figure shut up within high unscaleable walls of stone or bricks till next morning . . . The figure of Flora de Barral's father. De Barral the financier--the convict.

There is something in that word with its suggestions of guilt and retribution which arrests the thought. We feel ourselves in the presence of the power of organized society--a thing mysterious in itself and still more mysterious in its effect. Whether guilty or innocent, it was as if old de Barral had been down to the Nether Regions. Impossible to imagine what he would bring out from there to the light of this world of uncondemned men. What would he think? What would he have to say? And what was one to say to him?

Anthony, a little awed, as one is by a range of feelings stretching beyond one's grasp, comforted himself by the thought that probably the old fellow would have little to say. He wouldn't want to talk about it. No man would. It must have been a real hell to him.

And then Anthony, at the end of the day in which he had gone through a marriage ceremony with Flora de Barral, ceased to think of Flora's father except, as in some sort, the captive of his triumph. He turned to the mental contemplation of the white, delicate and appealing face with great blue eyes which he had seen weep and wonder and look profoundly at him, sometimes with incredulity, sometimes with doubt and pain, but always irresistible in the power to find their way right into his breast, to stir there a deep response which was something more than love--he said to himself,--as men understand it. More? Or was it only something other? Yes. It was something other. More or less. Something as incredible as the fulfilment of an amazing and startling dream in which he could take the world in his arms--all the suffering world--not to possess its pathetic fairness but to console and cherish its sorrow.

Anthony walked slowly to the ship and that night slept without dreams.