

## **Chapter XVI - Nobody's Weakness**

The time being come for the renewal of his acquaintance with the Meagles family, Clennam, pursuant to contract made between himself and Mr Meagles within the precincts of Bleeding Heart Yard, turned his face on a certain Saturday towards Twickenham, where Mr Meagles had a cottage-residence of his own. The weather being fine and dry, and any English road abounding in interest for him who had been so long away, he sent his valise on by the coach, and set out to walk. A walk was in itself a new enjoyment to him, and one that had rarely diversified his life afar off.

He went by Fulham and Putney, for the pleasure of strolling over the heath. It was bright and shining there; and when he found himself so far on his road to Twickenham, he found himself a long way on his road to a number of airier and less substantial destinations. They had risen before him fast, in the healthful exercise and the pleasant road. It is not easy to walk alone in the country without musing upon something. And he had plenty of unsettled subjects to meditate upon, though he had been walking to the Land's End.

First, there was the subject seldom absent from his mind, the question, what he was to do henceforth in life; to what occupation he should devote himself, and in what direction he had best seek it. He was far from rich, and every day of indecision and inaction made his inheritance a source of greater anxiety to him. As often as he began to consider how to increase this inheritance, or to lay it by, so often his misgiving that there was some one with an unsatisfied claim upon his justice, returned; and that alone was a subject to outlast the longest walk. Again, there was the subject of his relations with his mother, which were now upon an equable and peaceful but never confidential footing, and whom he saw several times a week. Little Dorrit was a leading and a constant subject: for the circumstances of his life, united to those of her own story, presented the little creature to him as the only person between whom and himself there were ties of innocent reliance on one hand, and affectionate protection on the other; ties of compassion, respect, unselfish interest, gratitude, and pity. Thinking of her, and of the possibility of her father's release from prison by the unbarring hand of death - the only change of circumstance he could foresee that might enable him to be such a friend to her as he wished to be, by altering her whole manner of life, smoothing her rough road, and giving her a home - he regarded her, in that perspective, as his adopted daughter, his poor child of the Marshalsea hushed to rest. If there were a last subject in his thoughts, and it lay towards Twickenham, its form was so indefinite that it was little more than the pervading atmosphere in which these other subjects floated before him.

He had crossed the heath and was leaving it behind when he gained upon a figure which had been in advance of him for some time, and which, as he gained upon it, he thought he knew. He derived this impression from something in the turn of the head, and in the figure's action of consideration, as it went on at a sufficiently sturdy walk. But when the man - for it was a man's figure - pushed his hat up at the back of his head, and stopped to consider some object before him, he knew it to be Daniel Doyce.

'How do you do, Mr Doyce?' said Clennam, overtaking him. 'I am glad to see you again, and in a healthier place than the Circumlocution Office.'

'Ha! Mr Meagles's friend!' exclaimed that public criminal, coming out of some mental combinations he had been making, and offering his hand. 'I am glad to see you, sir. Will you excuse me if I forget your name?'

'Readily. It's not a celebrated name. It's not Barnacle.' 'No, no,' said Daniel, laughing. 'And now I know what it is. It's Clennam. How do you do, Mr Clennam?'

'I have some hope,' said Arthur, as they walked on together, 'that we may be going to the same place, Mr Doyce.'

'Meaning Twickenham?' returned Daniel. 'I am glad to hear it.'

They were soon quite intimate, and lightened the way with a variety of conversation. The ingenious culprit was a man of great modesty and good sense; and, though a plain man, had been too much accustomed to combine what was original and daring in conception with what was patient and minute in execution, to be by any means an ordinary man. It was at first difficult to lead him to speak about himself, and he put off Arthur's advances in that direction by admitting slightly, oh yes, he had done this, and he had done that, and such a thing was of his making, and such another thing was his discovery, but it was his trade, you see, his trade; until, as he gradually became assured that his companion had a real interest in his account of himself, he frankly yielded to it. Then it appeared that he was the son of a north-country blacksmith, and had originally been apprenticed by his widowed mother to a lock-maker; that he had 'struck out a few little things' at the lock-maker's, which had led to his being released from his indentures with a present, which present had enabled him to gratify his ardent wish to bind himself to a working engineer, under whom he had laboured hard, learned hard, and lived hard, seven years. His time being out, he had 'worked in the shop' at weekly wages seven or eight years more; and had then betaken himself to the banks of the Clyde, where he had studied, and filed, and hammered, and improved

his knowledge, theoretical and practical, for six or seven years more. There he had had an offer to go to Lyons, which he had accepted; and from Lyons had been engaged to go to Germany, and in Germany had had an offer to go to St Petersburg, and there had done very well indeed - never better. However, he had naturally felt a preference for his own country, and a wish to gain distinction there, and to do whatever service he could do, there rather than elsewhere. And so he had come home. And so at home he had established himself in business, and had invented and executed, and worked his way on, until, after a dozen years of constant suit and service, he had been enrolled in the Great British Legion of Honour, the Legion of the Rebuffed of the Circumlocution Office, and had been decorated with the Great British Order of Merit, the Order of the Disorder of the Barnacles and Stiltstalkings.

'it is much to be regretted,' said Clennam, 'that you ever turned your thoughts that way, Mr Doyce.'

'True, sir, true to a certain extent. But what is a man to do? if he has the misfortune to strike out something serviceable to the nation, he must follow where it leads him.' 'Hadn't he better let it go?' said Clennam.

'He can't do it,' said Doyce, shaking his head with a thoughtful smile. 'It's not put into his head to be buried. It's put into his head to be made useful. You hold your life on the condition that to the last you shall struggle hard for it. Every man holds a discovery on the same terms.'

'That is to say,' said Arthur, with a growing admiration of his quiet companion, 'you are not finally discouraged even now?'

'I have no right to be, if I am,' returned the other. 'The thing is as true as it ever was.'

When they had walked a little way in silence, Clennam, at once to change the direct point of their conversation and not to change it too abruptly, asked Mr Doyce if he had any partner in his business to relieve him of a portion of its anxieties?

'No,' he returned, 'not at present. I had when I first entered on it, and a good man he was. But he has been dead some years; and as I could not easily take to the notion of another when I lost him, I bought his share for myself and have gone on by myself ever since. And here's another thing,' he said, stopping for a moment with a good-humoured laugh in his eyes, and laying his closed right hand, with its peculiar suppleness of thumb, on Clennam's arm, 'no inventor can be a man of business, you know.'

'No?' said Clennam.

'Why, so the men of business say,' he answered, resuming the walk and laughing outright. 'I don't know why we unfortunate creatures should be supposed to want common sense, but it is generally taken for granted that we do. Even the best friend I have in the world, our excellent friend over yonder,' said Doyce, nodding towards Twickenham, 'extends a sort of protection to me, don't you know, as a man not quite able to take care of himself?'

Arthur Clennam could not help joining in the good-humoured laugh, for he recognised the truth of the description.

'So I find that I must have a partner who is a man of business and not guilty of any inventions,' said Daniel Doyce, taking off his hat to pass his hand over his forehead, 'if it's only in deference to the current opinion, and to uphold the credit of the Works. I don't think he'll find that I have been very remiss or confused in my way of conducting them; but that's for him to say - whoever he is - not for me.' 'You have not chosen him yet, then?'

'No, sir, no. I have only just come to a decision to take one. The fact is, there's more to do than there used to be, and the Works are enough for me as I grow older. What with the books and correspondence, and foreign journeys for which a Principal is necessary, I can't do all. I am going to talk over the best way of negotiating the matter, if I find a spare half-hour between this and Monday morning, with my - my Nurse and protector,' said Doyce, with laughing eyes again. 'He is a sagacious man in business, and has had a good apprenticeship to it.'

After this, they conversed on different subjects until they arrived at their journey's end. A composed and unobtrusive self-sustainment was noticeable in Daniel Doyce - a calm knowledge that what was true must remain true, in spite of all the Barnacles in the family ocean, and would be just the truth, and neither more nor less when even that sea had run dry - which had a kind of greatness in it, though not of the official quality.

As he knew the house well, he conducted Arthur to it by the way that showed it to the best advantage. It was a charming place (none the worse for being a little eccentric), on the road by the river, and just what the residence of the Meagles family ought to be. It stood in a garden, no doubt as fresh and beautiful in the May of the Year as Pet now was in the May of her life; and it was defended by a goodly show of handsome trees and spreading evergreens, as Pet was by Mr and Mrs Meagles. It was made out of an old brick house, of which a part had been altogether pulled down, and another part had been changed into the present cottage; so there was a hale elderly portion, to

represent Mr and Mrs Meagles, and a young picturesque, very pretty portion to represent Pet. There was even the later addition of a conservatory sheltering itself against it, uncertain of hue in its deep-stained glass, and in its more transparent portions flashing to the sun's rays, now like fire and now like harmless water drops; which might have stood for Tattycoram. Within view was the peaceful river and the ferry-boat, to moralise to all the inmates saying: Young or old, passionate or tranquil, chafing or content, you, thus runs the current always. Let the heart swell into what discord it will, thus plays the rippling water on the prow of the ferry-boat ever the same tune. Year after year, so much allowance for the drifting of the boat, so many miles an hour the flowing of the stream, here the rushes, there the lilies, nothing uncertain or unquiet, upon this road that steadily runs away; while you, upon your flowing road of time, are so capricious and distracted.

The bell at the gate had scarcely sounded when Mr Meagles came out to receive them. Mr Meagles had scarcely come out, when Mrs Meagles came out. Mrs Meagles had scarcely come out, when Pet came out. Pet scarcely had come out, when Tattycoram came out. Never had visitors a more hospitable reception.

'Here we are, you see,' said Mr Meagles, 'boxed up, Mr Clennam, within our own home-limits, as if we were never going to expand - that is, travel - again. Not like Marseilles, eh? No allonging and marshonging here!'

'A different kind of beauty, indeed!' said Clennam, looking about him.

'But, Lord bless me!' cried Mr Meagles, rubbing his hands with a relish, 'it was an uncommonly pleasant thing being in quarantine, wasn't it? Do you know, I have often wished myself back again? We were a capital party.'

This was Mr Meagles's invariable habit. Always to object to everything while he was travelling, and always to want to get back to it when he was not travelling.

'If it was summer-time,' said Mr Meagles, 'which I wish it was on your account, and in order that you might see the place at its best, you would hardly be able to hear yourself speak for birds. Being practical people, we never allow anybody to scare the birds; and the birds, being practical people too, come about us in myriads. We are delighted to see you, Clennam (if you'll allow me, I shall drop the Mister); I heartily assure you, we are delighted.'

'I have not had so pleasant a greeting,' said Clennam - then he recalled what Little Dorrit had said to him in his own room, and

faithfully added 'except once - since we last walked to and fro, looking down at the Mediterranean.'

'Ah!' returned Mr Meagles. 'Something like a look out, that was, wasn't it? I don't want a military government, but I shouldn't mind a little allonging and marshonging - just a dash of it - in this neighbourhood sometimes. It's Devilish still.'

Bestowing this eulogium on the retired character of his retreat with a dubious shake of the head, Mr Meagles led the way into the house. It was just large enough, and no more; was as pretty within as it was without, and was perfectly well-arranged and comfortable.

Some traces of the migratory habits of the family were to be observed in the covered frames and furniture, and wrapped-up hangings; but it was easy to see that it was one of Mr Meagles's whims to have the cottage always kept, in their absence, as if they were always coming back the day after to-morrow. Of articles collected on his various expeditions, there was such a vast miscellany that it was like the dwelling of an amiable Corsair. There were antiquities from Central Italy, made by the best modern houses in that department of industry; bits of mummy from Egypt (and perhaps Birmingham); model gondolas from Venice; model villages from Switzerland; morsels of tessellated pavement from Herculaneum and Pompeii, like petrified minced veal; ashes out of tombs, and lava out of Vesuvius; Spanish fans, Spezzian straw hats, Moorish slippers, Tuscan hairpins, Carrara sculpture, Trastaverini scarves, Genoese velvets and filigree, Neapolitan coral, Roman cameos, Geneva jewellery, Arab lanterns, rosaries blest all round by the Pope himself, and an infinite variety of lumber. There were views, like and unlike, of a multitude of places; and there was one little picture-room devoted to a few of the regular sticky old Saints, with sinews like whipcord, hair like Neptune's, wrinkles like tattooing, and such coats of varnish that every holy personage served for a fly-trap, and became what is now called in the vulgar tongue a Catch-em-alive O. Of these pictorial acquisitions Mr Meagles spoke in the usual manner. He was no judge, he said, except of what pleased himself; he had picked them up, dirt-cheap, and people had considered them rather fine. One man, who at any rate ought to know something of the subject, had declared that 'Sage, Reading' (a specially oily old gentleman in a blanket, with a swan's-down tippet for a beard, and a web of cracks all over him like rich pie-crust), to be a fine Guercino. As for Sebastian del Piombo there, you would judge for yourself; if it were not his later manner, the question was, Who was it? Titian, that might or might not be - perhaps he had only touched it. Daniel Doyce said perhaps he hadn't touched it, but Mr Meagles rather declined to overhear the remark.

When he had shown all his spoils, Mr Meagles took them into his own snug room overlooking the lawn, which was fitted up in part like a dressing-room and in part like an office, and in which, upon a kind of counter-desk, were a pair of brass scales for weighing gold, and a scoop for shovelling out money.

'Here they are, you see,' said Mr Meagles. 'I stood behind these two articles five-and-thirty years running, when I no more thought of gadding about than I now think of - staying at home. When I left the Bank for good, I asked for them, and brought them away with me.'

I mention it at once, or you might suppose that I sit in my counting-house (as Pet says I do), like the king in the poem of the four-and-twenty blackbirds, counting out my money.'

Clennam's eyes had strayed to a natural picture on the wall, of two pretty little girls with their arms entwined. 'Yes, Clennam,' said Mr Meagles, in a lower voice. 'There they both are. It was taken some seventeen years ago. As I often say to Mother, they were babies then.'

'Their names?' said Arthur.

'Ah, to be sure! You have never heard any name but Pet. Pet's name is Minnie; her sister's Lillie.'

'Should you have known, Mr Clennam, that one of them was meant for me?' asked Pet herself, now standing in the doorway.

'I might have thought that both of them were meant for you, both are still so like you. Indeed,' said Clennam, glancing from the fair original to the picture and back, 'I cannot even now say which is not your portrait.' 'D'ye hear that, Mother?' cried Mr Meagles to his wife, who had followed her daughter. 'It's always the same, Clennam; nobody can decide. The child to your left is Pet.'

The picture happened to be near a looking-glass. As Arthur looked at it again, he saw, by the reflection of the mirror, Tattycoram stop in passing outside the door, listen to what was going on, and pass away with an angry and contemptuous frown upon her face, that changed its beauty into ugliness.

'But come!' said Mr Meagles. 'You have had a long walk, and will be glad to get your boots off. As to Daniel here, I suppose he'd never think of taking his boots off, unless we showed him a boot-jack.'

'Why not?' asked Daniel, with a significant smile at Clennam.

'Oh! You have so many things to think about,' returned Mr Meagles, clapping him on the shoulder, as if his weakness must not be left to itself on any account. 'Figures, and wheels, and cogs, and levers, and screws, and cylinders, and a thousand things.'

'In my calling,' said Daniel, amused, 'the greater usually includes the less. But never mind, never mind! Whatever pleases you, pleases me.'

Clennam could not help speculating, as he seated himself in his room by the fire, whether there might be in the breast of this honest, affectionate, and cordial Mr Meagles, any microscopic portion of the mustard-seed that had sprung up into the great tree of the Circumlocution Office. His curious sense of a general superiority to Daniel Doyce, which seemed to be founded, not so much on anything in Doyce's personal character as on the mere fact of his being an originator and a man out of the beaten track of other men, suggested the idea. It might have occupied him until he went down to dinner an hour afterwards, if he had not had another question to consider, which had been in his mind so long ago as before he was in quarantine at Marseilles, and which had now returned to it, and was very urgent with it. No less a question than this: Whether he should allow himself to fall in love with Pet?

He was twice her age. (He changed the leg he had crossed over the other, and tried the calculation again, but could not bring out the total at less.) He was twice her age. Well! He was young in appearance, young in health and strength, young in heart. A man was certainly not old at forty; and many men were not in circumstances to marry, or did not marry, until they had attained that time of life. On the other hand, the question was, not what he thought of the point, but what she thought of it.

He believed that Mr Meagles was disposed to entertain a ripe regard for him, and he knew that he had a sincere regard for Mr Meagles and his good wife. He could foresee that to relinquish this beautiful only child, of whom they were so fond, to any husband, would be a trial of their love which perhaps they never yet had had the fortitude to contemplate. But the more beautiful and winning and charming she, the nearer they must always be to the necessity of approaching it. And why not in his favour, as well as in another's?

When he had got so far, it came again into his head that the question was, not what they thought of it, but what she thought of it.

Arthur Clennam was a retiring man, with a sense of many deficiencies; and he so exalted the merits of the beautiful Minnie in his mind, and depressed his own, that when he pinned himself to this point, his hopes began to fail him. He came to the final resolution, as



he made himself ready for dinner, that he would not allow himself to fall in love with Pet.

There were only five, at a round table, and it was very pleasant indeed. They had so many places and people to recall, and they were all so easy and cheerful together (Daniel Doyce either sitting out like an amused spectator at cards, or coming in with some shrewd little experiences of his own, when it happened to be to the purpose), that they might have been together twenty times, and not have known so much of one another.

'And Miss Wade,' said Mr Meagles, after they had recalled a number of fellow-travellers. 'Has anybody seen Miss Wade?'

'I have,' said Tattycoram.

She had brought a little mantle which her young mistress had sent for, and was bending over her, putting it on, when she lifted up her dark eyes and made this unexpected answer.

'Tatty!' her young mistress exclaimed. 'You seen Miss Wade? - where?'

'Here, miss,' said Tattycoram.

'How?'

An impatient glance from Tattycoram seemed, as Clennam saw it, to answer 'With my eyes!' But her only answer in words was: 'I met her near the church.'

'What was she doing there I wonder!' said Mr Meagles. 'Not going to it, I should think.'

'She had written to me first,' said Tattycoram.

'Oh, Tatty!' murmured her mistress, 'take your hands away. I feel as if some one else was touching me!'

She said it in a quick involuntary way, but half playfully, and not more petulantly or disagreeably than a favourite child might have done, who laughed next moment. Tattycoram set her full red lips together, and crossed her arms upon her bosom. 'Did you wish to know, sir,' she said, looking at Mr Meagles, 'what Miss Wade wrote to me about?'

'Well, Tattycoram,' returned Mr Meagles, 'since you ask the question, and we are all friends here, perhaps you may as well mention it, if you are so inclined.'

'She knew, when we were travelling, where you lived,' said Tattycoram, 'and she had seen me not quite - not quite - '

'Not quite in a good temper, Tattycoram?' suggested Mr Meagles, shaking his head at the dark eyes with a quiet caution. 'Take a little time - count five-and-twenty, Tattycoram.'

She pressed her lips together again, and took a long deep breath.

'So she wrote to me to say that if I ever felt myself hurt,' she looked down at her young mistress, 'or found myself worried,' she looked down at her again, 'I might go to her, and be considerately treated. I was to think of it, and could speak to her by the church. So I went there to thank her.'

'Tatty,' said her young mistress, putting her hand up over her shoulder that the other might take it, 'Miss Wade almost frightened me when we parted, and I scarcely like to think of her just now as having been so near me without my knowing it. Tatty dear!'

Tatty stood for a moment, immovable.

'Hey?' cried Mr Meagles. 'Count another five-and-twenty, Tattycoram.'

She might have counted a dozen, when she bent and put her lips to the caressing hand. It patted her cheek, as it touched the owner's beautiful curls, and Tattycoram went away. 'Now there,' said Mr Meagles softly, as he gave a turn to the dumb-waiter on his right hand to twirl the sugar towards himself. 'There's a girl who might be lost and ruined, if she wasn't among practical people. Mother and I know, solely from being practical, that there are times when that girl's whole nature seems to roughen itself against seeing us so bound up in Pet. No father and mother were bound up in her, poor soul. I don't like to think of the way in which that unfortunate child, with all that passion and protest in her, feels when she hears the Fifth Commandment on a Sunday. I am always inclined to call out, Church, Count five-and-twenty, Tattycoram.'

Besides his dumb-waiter, Mr Meagles had two other not dumb waiters in the persons of two parlour-maids with rosy faces and bright eyes, who were a highly ornamental part of the table decoration. 'And why not, you see?' said Mr Meagles on this head. 'As I always say to Mother, why not have something pretty to look at, if you have anything at all?' A certain Mrs Tickit, who was Cook and Housekeeper when the family were at home, and Housekeeper only when the family were away, completed the establishment. Mr Meagles regretted that the nature of the duties in which she was engaged, rendered Mrs Tickit unpresentable at present, but hoped to introduce her to the new

visitor to-morrow. She was an important part of the Cottage, he said, and all his friends knew her. That was her picture up in the corner. When they went away, she always put on the silk-gown and the jet-black row of curls represented in that portrait (her hair was reddish-grey in the kitchen), established herself in the breakfast-room, put her spectacles between two particular leaves of Doctor Buchan's Domestic Medicine, and sat looking over the blind all day until they came back again. It was supposed that no persuasion could be invented which would induce Mrs Tickit to abandon her post at the blind, however long their absence, or to dispense with the attendance of Dr Buchan; the lucubrations of which learned practitioner, Mr Meagles implicitly believed she had never yet consulted to the extent of one word in her life.

In the evening they played an old-fashioned rubber; and Pet sat looking over her father's hand, or singing to herself by fits and starts at the piano. She was a spoiled child; but how could she be otherwise? Who could be much with so pliable and beautiful a creature, and not yield to her endearing influence? Who could pass an evening in the house, and not love her for the grace and charm of her very presence in the room? This was Clennam's reflection, notwithstanding the final conclusion at which he had arrived up- stairs.

In making it, he revoked. 'Why, what are you thinking of, my good sir?' asked the astonished Mr Meagles, who was his partner.

'I beg your pardon. Nothing,' returned Clennam.

'Think of something, next time; that's a dear fellow,' said Mr Meagles.

Pet laughingly believed he had been thinking of Miss Wade.

'Why of Miss Wade, Pet?' asked her father.

'Why, indeed!' said Arthur Clennam.

Pet coloured a little, and went to the piano again.

As they broke up for the night, Arthur overheard Doyce ask his host if he could give him half an hour's conversation before breakfast in the morning? The host replying willingly, Arthur lingered behind a moment, having his own word to add to that topic.

'Mr Meagles,' he said, on their being left alone, 'do you remember when you advised me to go straight to London?'

'Perfectly well.' 'And when you gave me some other good advice which I needed at that time?'

'I won't say what it was worth,' answered Mr Meagles: 'but of course I remember our being very pleasant and confidential together.' 'I have acted on your advice; and having disembarassed myself of an occupation that was painful to me for many reasons, wish to devote myself and what means I have, to another pursuit.'

'Right! You can't do it too soon,' said Mr Meagles.

'Now, as I came down to-day, I found that your friend, Mr Doyce, is looking for a partner in his business - not a partner in his mechanical knowledge, but in the ways and means of turning the business arising from it to the best account.'

'Just so,' said Mr Meagles, with his hands in his pockets, and with the old business expression of face that had belonged to the scales and scoop.

'Mr Doyce mentioned incidentally, in the course of our conversation, that he was going to take your valuable advice on the subject of finding such a partner. If you should think our views and opportunities at all likely to coincide, perhaps you will let him know my available position. I speak, of course, in ignorance of the details, and they may be unsuitable on both sides.'

'No doubt, no doubt,' said Mr Meagles, with the caution belonging to the scales and scoop.

'But they will be a question of figures and accounts - '

'Just so, just so,' said Mr Meagles, with arithmetical solidity belonging to the scales and scoop.

' - And I shall be glad to enter into the subject, provided Mr Doyce responds, and you think well of it. If you will at present, therefore, allow me to place it in your hands, you will much oblige me.'

'Clennam, I accept the trust with readiness,' said Mr Meagles. 'And without anticipating any of the points which you, as a man of business, have of course reserved, I am free to say to you that I think something may come of this. Of one thing you may be perfectly certain. Daniel is an honest man.'

'I am so sure of it that I have promptly made up my mind to speak to you.' 'You must guide him, you know; you must steer him; you must direct him; he is one of a crotchety sort,' said Mr Meagles, evidently meaning nothing more than that he did new things and went new ways; 'but he is as honest as the sun, and so good night!' Clennam went back to his room, sat down again before his fire, and made up

his mind that he was glad he had resolved not to fall in love with Pet. She was so beautiful, so amiable, so apt to receive any true impression given to her gentle nature and her innocent heart, and make the man who should be so happy as to communicate it, the most fortunate and enviable of all men, that he was very glad indeed he had come to that conclusion.

But, as this might have been a reason for coming to the opposite conclusion, he followed out the theme again a little way in his mind; to justify himself, perhaps.

'Suppose that a man,' so his thoughts ran, 'who had been of age some twenty years or so; who was a diffident man, from the circumstances of his youth; who was rather a grave man, from the tenor of his life; who knew himself to be deficient in many little engaging qualities which he admired in others, from having been long in a distant region, with nothing softening near him; who had no kind sisters to present to her; who had no congenial home to make her known in; who was a stranger in the land; who had not a fortune to compensate, in any measure, for these defects; who had nothing in his favour but his honest love and his general wish to do right - suppose such a man were to come to this house, and were to yield to the captivation of this charming girl, and were to persuade himself that he could hope to win her; what a weakness it would be!'

He softly opened his window, and looked out upon the serene river. Year after year so much allowance for the drifting of the ferry-boat, so many miles an hour the flowing of the stream, here the rushes, there the lilies, nothing uncertain or unquiet.

Why should he be vexed or sore at heart? It was not his weakness that he had imagined. It was nobody's, nobody's within his knowledge; why should it trouble him? And yet it did trouble him. And he thought - who has not thought for a moment, sometimes? - that it might be better to flow away monotonously, like the river, and to compound for its insensibility to happiness with its insensibility to pain.