Chapter XLVIII

'Tis hard and ill-paid task to order all things beforehand by the rule of our own security, as is well hinted by Machiavelli concerning Caesar Borgia, who, saith he, had thought of all that might occur on his father's death, and had provided against every evil chance save only one: it had never come into his mind that when his father died, his own death would quickly follow.

Grandcourt's importance as a subject of this realm was of the grandly passive kind which consists in the inheritance of land. Political and social movements touched him only through the wire of his rental, and his most careful biographer need not have read up on Schleswig-Holstein, the policy of Bismarck, trade-unions, household suffrage, or even the last commercial panic. He glanced over the best newspaper columns on these topics, and his views on them can hardly be said to have wanted breadth, since he embraced all Germans, all commercial men, and all voters liable to use the wrong kind of soap, under the general epithet of 'brutes;' but he took no action on these much-agitated questions beyond looking from under his eyelids at any man who mentioned them, and retaining a silence which served to shake the opinions of timid thinkers.

But Grandcourt, within his own sphere of interest, showed some of the qualities which have entered into triumphal diplomacy of the wildest continental sort.

No movement of Gwendolen in relation to Deronda escaped him. He would have denied that he was jealous; because jealousy would have implied some doubt of his own power to hinder what he had determined against. That his wife should have more inclination to another man's society than to his own would not pain him: what he required was that she should be as fully aware as she would have been of a locked hand-cuff, that her inclination was helpless to decide anything in contradiction with his resolve. However much of vacillating whim there might have been in his entrance on matrimony, there was no vacillating in his interpretation of the bond. He had not repented of his marriage; it had really brought more of aim into his life, new objects to exert his will upon; and he had not repented of his choice. His taste was fastidious, and Gwendolen satisfied it: he would not have liked a wife who had not received some elevation of rank from him; nor one who did not command admiration by her mien and beauty; nor one whose nails were not of the right shape; nor one the lobe of whose ear was at all too large and red; nor one who, even if her nails and ears were right, was at the same time a ninny, unable to make spirited answers. These requirements may not seem too exacting to refined contemporaries whose own ability to fall in love has been held in suspense for lack of indispensable details; but fewer

perhaps may follow him in his contentment that his wife should be in a temper which would dispose her to fly out if she dared, and that she should have been urged into marrying him by other feelings than passionate attachment. Still, for those who prefer command to love, one does not see why the habit of mind should change precisely at the point of matrimony.

Grandcourt did not feel that he had chosen the wrong wife; and having taken on himself the part of husband, he was not going in any way to be fooled, or allow himself to be seen in a light that could be regarded as pitiable. This was his state of mind - not jealousy; still, his behavior in some respects was as like jealousy as yellow is to yellow, which color we know may be the effect of very different causes.

He had come up to town earlier than usual because he wished to be on the spot for legal consultation as to the arrangements of his will, the transference of mortgages, and that transaction with his uncle about the succession to Diplow, which the bait of ready money, adroitly dangled without importunity, had finally won him to agree upon. But another acceptable accompaniment of his being in town was the presentation of himself with the beautiful bride whom he had chosen to marry in spite of what other people might have expected of him. It is true that Grandcourt went about with the sense that he did not care a languid curse for any one's admiration: but this state of not-caring, just as much as desire, required its related object - namely, a world of admiring or envying spectators: for if you are fond of looking stonily at smiling persons - the persons must be and they must smile - a rudimentary truth which is surely forgotten by those who complain of mankind as generally contemptible, since any other aspect of the race must disappoint the voracity of their contempt. Grandcourt, in town for the first time with his wife, had his non-caring abstinence from curses enlarged and diversified by splendid receptions, by conspicuous rides and drives, by presentations of himself with her on all distinguished occasions. He wished her to be sought after; he liked that ‘fellows’ should be eager to talk with her and escort her within his observation; there was even a kind of lofty coquetry on her part that he would not have objected to. But what he did not like were her ways in relation to Deronda.

After the musical party at Lady Mallinger's, when Grandcourt had observed the dialogue on the settee as keenly as Hans had done, it was characteristic of him that he named Deronda for invitation along with the Mallinger's, tenaciously avoiding the possible suggestion to anybody concerned that Deronda's presence or absence could be of the least importance to him; and he made no direct observation to Gwendolen on her behavior that evening, lest the expression of his disgust should be a little too strong to satisfy his own pride. But a few days afterward he remarked, without being careful of the *a propos* -

‘Nothing makes a woman more of a gawky than looking out after people and showing tempers in public. A woman ought to have good manners. Else it's intolerable to appear with her.’

Gwendolen made the expected application, and was not without alarm at the notion of being a gawky. For she, too, with her melancholy distaste for things, preferred that her distaste should include admirers. But the sense of overhanging rebuke only intensified the strain of expectation toward any meeting with Deronda. The novelty and excitement of her town life was like the hurry and constant change of foreign travel; whatever might be the inward despondency, there was a programme to be fulfilled, not without gratification to many-sided self. But, as always happens with a deep interest, the comparatively rare occasions on which she could exchange any words with Deronda had a diffusive effect in her consciousness, magnifying their communication with each other, and therefore enlarging the place she imagined it to have in his mind. How could Deronda help this? He certainly did not avoid her; rather he wished to convince her by every delicate indirect means that her confidence in him had not been indiscreet since it had not lowered his respect. Moreover he liked being near her - how could it be otherwise? She was something more than a problem: she was a lovely woman, for the turn of whose mind and fate he had a care which, however futile it might be, kept soliciting him as a responsibility, perhaps all the more that, when he dared to think of his own future, he saw it lying far away from this splendid sad-hearted creature, who, because he had once been impelled to arrest her attention momentarily, as he might have seized her arm with warning to hinder her from stepping where there was danger, had turned to him with a beseeching persistent need.

One instance in which Grandcourt stimulated a feeling in Gwendolen that he would have liked to suppress without seeming to care about it, had relation to Mirah. Gwendolen's inclination lingered over the project of the singing lessons as a sort of obedience to Deronda's advice, but day followed day with that want of perceived leisure which belongs to lives where there is no work to mark off intervals; and the continual liability to Grandcourt's presence and surveillance seemed to flatten every effort to the level of the boredom which his manner expressed; his negative mind was as diffusive as fog, clinging to all objects, and spoiling all contact.

But one morning when they were breakfasting, Gwendolen, in a recurrent fit of determination to exercise the old spirit, said, dallying prettily over her prawns without eating them -

‘I think of making myself accomplished while we are in town, and having singing lessons.’

'Why?' said Grandcourt, languidly.

'Why?' echoed Gwendolen, playing at sauciness; 'because I can't eat *pate de foie gras* to make me sleepy, and I can't smoke, and I can't go to the club to make me like to come away again - I want a variety of *ennui*. What would be the most convenient time, when you are busy with your lawyers and people, for me to have lessons from that little Jewess, whose singing is getting all the rage.'

'Whenever you like,' said Grandcourt, pushing away his plate, and leaning back in his chair while he looked at her with his most lizard-like expression and, played with the ears of the tiny spaniel on his lap (Gwendolen had taken a dislike to the dogs because they fawned on him).

Then he said, languidly, 'I don't see why a lady should sing. Amateurs make fools of themselves. A lady can't risk herself in that way in company. And one doesn't want to hear squalling in private.'

'I like frankness: that seems to me a husband's great charm,' said Gwendolen, with her little upward movement of her chin, as she turned her eyes away from his, and lifting a prawn before her, looked at the boiled ingenuousness of its eyes as preferable to the lizard's. 'But;' she added, having devoured her mortification, 'I suppose you don't object to Miss Lapidoth's singing at our party on the fourth? I thought of engaging her. Lady Brackenshaw had her, you know: and the Raymonds, who are very particular about their music. And Mr Deronda, who is a musician himself and a first-rate judge, says there is no singing in such good taste as hers for a drawing-room. I think his opinion is an authority.'

She meant to sling a small stone at her husband in that way.

'It's very indecent of Deronda to go about praising that girl,' said Grandcourt in a tone of indifference.

'Indecent!' exclaimed Gwendolen, reddening and looking at him again, overcome by startled wonder, and unable to reflect on the probable falsity of the phrase - 'to go about praising.'

'Yes; and especially when she is patronized by Lady Mallinger. He ought to hold his tongue about her. Men can see what is his relation to her.'

'Men who judge of others by themselves,' said Gwendolen, turning white after her redness, and immediately smitten with a dread of her own words.

‘Of course. And a woman should take their judgment - else she is likely to run her head into the wrong place,’ said Grandcourt, conscious of using pinchers on that white creature. ‘I suppose you take Deronda for a saint.’

‘Oh dear no?’ said Gwendolen, summoning desperately her almost miraculous power of self-control, and speaking in a high hard tone. ‘Only a little less of a monster.’

She rose, pushed her chair away without hurry, and walked out of the room with something like the care of a man who is afraid of showing that he has taken more wine than usual. She turned the keys inside her dressing-room doors, and sat down for some time looking pale and quiet as when she was leaving the breakfast-room. Even in the moments after reading the poisonous letter she had hardly had more cruel sensations than now; for emotion was at the acute point, where it is not distinguishable from sensation. Deronda unlike what she had believed him to be, was an image which affected her as a hideous apparition would have done, quite apart from the way in which it was produced. It had taken hold of her as pain before she could consider whether it were fiction or truth; and further to hinder her power of resistance came the sudden perception, how very slight were the grounds of her faith in Deronda - how little she knew of his life - how childish she had been in her confidence. His rebukes and his severity to her began to seem odious, along with all the poetry and lofty doctrine in the world, whatever it might be; and the grave beauty of his face seemed the most unpleasant mask that the common habits of men could put on.

All this went on in her with the rapidity of a sick dream; and her start into resistance was very much like a waking. Suddenly from out the gray sombre morning there came a stream of sunshine, wrapping her in warmth and light where she sat in stony stillness. She moved gently and looked round her - there was a world outside this bad dream, and the dream proved nothing; she rose, stretching her arms upward and clasping her hands with her habitual attitude when she was seeking relief from oppressive feeling, and walked about the room in this flood of sunbeams.

‘It is not true! What does it matter whether *he* believes it or not?’ This is what she repeated to herself - but this was not her faith come back again; it was only the desperate cry of faith, finding suffocation intolerable. And how could she go on through the day in this state? With one of her impetuous alternations, her imagination flew to wild actions by which she would convince herself of what she wished: she would go to Lady Mallinger and question her about Mirah; she would write to Deronda and upbraid him with making the world all false and wicked and hopeless to her - to him she dared pour out all the bitter

indignation of her heart. No; she would go to Mirah. This last form taken by her need was more definitely practicable, and quickly became imperious. No matter what came of it. She had the pretext of asking Mirah to sing at her party on the fourth. What was she going to say beside? How satisfy? She did not foresee - she could not wait to foresee. If that idea which was maddening her had been a living thing, she would have wanted to throttle it without waiting to foresee what would come of the act. She rang her bell and asked if Mr Grandcourt were gone out: finding that he was, she ordered the carriage, and began to dress for the drive; then she went down, and walked about the large drawing-room like an imprisoned dumb creature, not recognizing herself in the glass panels, not noting any object around her in the painted gilded prison. Her husband would probably find out where she had been, and punish her in some way or other - no matter - she could neither desire nor fear anything just now but the assurance that she had not been deluding herself in her trust.

She was provided with Mirah's address. Soon she was on the way with all the fine equipage necessary to carry about her poor uneasy heart, depending in its palpitations on some answer or other to questioning which she did not know how she should put. She was as heedless of what happened before she found that Miss Lapidoth was at home, as one is of lobbies and passages on the way to a court of justice - heedless of everything till she was in a room where there were folding-doors, and she heard Deronda's voice behind it. Doubtless the identification was helped by forecast, but she was as certain of it as if she had seen him. She was frightened at her own agitation, and began to unbutton her gloves that she might button them again, and bite her lips over the pretended difficulty, while the door opened, and Mirah presented herself with perfect quietude and a sweet smile of recognition. There was relief in the sight of her face, and Gwendolen was able to smile in return, while she put out her hand in silence; and as she seated herself, all the while hearing the voice, she felt some reflux of energy in the confused sense that the truth could not be anything that she dreaded. Mirah drew her chair very near, as if she felt that the sound of the conversation should be subdued, and looked at her visitor with placid expectation, while Gwendolen began in a low tone, with something that seemed like bashfulness -

'Perhaps you wonder to see me - perhaps I ought to have written - but I wished to make a particular request.'

'I am glad to see you instead of having a letter,' said Mirah, wondering at the changed expression and manner of the 'Vandyke duchess,' as Hans had taught her to call Gwendolen. The rich color and the calmness of her own face were in strong contrast with the pale agitated beauty under the plumed hat.

‘I thought,’ Gwendolen went on - ‘at least I hoped, you would not object to sing at our house on the 4th - in the evening - at a party like Lady Brackenshaw's. I should be so much obliged.’

‘I shall be very happy to sing for you. At ten?’ said Mirah, while Gwendolen seemed to get more instead of less embarrassed.

‘At ten, please,’ she answered; then paused, and felt that she had nothing more to say. She could not go. It was impossible to rise and say good-bye. Deronda's voice was in her ears. She must say it - she could contrive no other sentence -

‘ Mr Deronda is in the next room.’

‘Yes,’ said Mirah, in her former tone. ‘He is reading Hebrew with my brother.’

‘You have a brother?’ said Gwendolen, who had heard this from Lady Mallinger, but had not minded it then.

‘Yes, a dear brother who is ill-consumptive, and Mr Deronda is the best of friends to him, as he has been to me,’ said Mirah, with the impulse that will not let us pass the mention of a precious person indifferently.

‘Tell me,’ said Gwendolen, putting her hand on Mirah's, and speaking hardly above a whisper - ‘tell me - tell me the truth. You are sure he is quite good. You know no evil of him. Any evil that people say of him is false.’

Could the proud-spirited woman have behaved more like a child? But the strange words penetrated Mirah with nothing but a sense of solemnity and indignation. With a sudden light in her eyes and a tremor in her voice, she said -

‘Who are the people that say evil of him? I would not believe any evil of him, if an angel came to tell it me. He found me when I was so miserable - I was going to drown myself; I looked so poor and forsaken; you would have thought I was a beggar by the wayside. And he treated me as if I had been a king's daughter. He took me to the best of women. He found my brother for me. And he honors my brother - though he too was poor - oh, almost as poor as he could be. And my brother honors him. That is no light thing to say’ - here Mirah's tone changed to one of profound emphasis, and she shook her head backward: ‘for my brother is very learned and great-minded. And Mr Deronda says there are few men equal to him.’ Some Jewish defiance had flamed into her indignant gratitude and her anger could

not help including Gwendolen since she seemed to have doubted Deronda's goodness.

But Gwendolen was like one parched with thirst, drinking the fresh water that spreads through the frame as a sufficient bliss. She did not notice that Mirah was angry with her; she was not distinctly conscious of anything but of the penetrating sense that Deronda and his life were no more like her husband's conception than the morning in the horizon was like the morning mixed with street gas. Even Mirah's words sank into the indefiniteness of her relief. She could hardly have repeated them, or said how her whole state of feeling was changed. She pressed Mirah's hand, and said, 'Thank you, thank you,' in a hurried whisper, then rose, and added, with only a hazy consciousness, 'I must go, I shall see you - on the fourth - I am so much obliged' - bowing herself out automatically, while Mirah, opening the door for her, wondered at what seemed a sudden retreat into chill loftiness.

Gwendolen, indeed, had no feeling to spare in any effusiveness toward the creature who had brought her relief. The passionate need of contradiction to Grandcourt's estimate of Deronda, a need which had blunted her sensibility to everything else, was no sooner satisfied than she wanted to be gone. She began to be aware that she was out of place, and to dread Deronda's seeing her. And once in the carriage again, she had the vision of what awaited her at home. When she drew up before the door in Grosvenor Square, her husband was arriving with a cigar between his fingers. He threw it away and handed her out, accompanying her up-stairs. She turned into the drawing-room, lest he should follow her farther and give her no place to retreat to; then she sat down with a weary air, taking off her gloves, rubbing her hand over her forehead, and making his presence as much of a cipher as possible. But he sat, too, and not far from her - just in front, where to avoid looking at him must have the emphasis of effort.

'May I ask where you have been at this extraordinary hour?' said Grandcourt.

'Oh, yes; I have been to Miss Lapidoth's, to ask her to come and sing for us,' said Gwendolen, laying her gloves on the little table beside her, and looking down at them.

'And to ask her about her relations with Deronda?' said Grandcourt, with the coldest possible sneer in his low voice which in poor Gwendolen's ear was diabolical.

For the first time since their marriage she flashed out upon him without inward check. Turning her eyes full on his she said, in a biting tone -

'Yes; and what you said is false - a low, wicked falsehood.'

'She told you so - did she?' returned Grandcourt, with a more thoroughly distilled sneer.

Gwendolen was mute. The daring anger within her was turned into the rage of dumbness. What reasons for her belief could she give? All the reasons that seemed so strong and living within her - she saw them suffocated and shrivelled up under her husband's breath. There was no proof to give, but her own impression, which would seem to him her own folly. She turned her head quickly away from him and looked angrily toward the end of the room: she would have risen, but he was in her way.

Grandcourt saw his advantage. 'It's of no consequence so far as her singing goes,' he said, in his superficial drawl. 'You can have her to sing, if you like.' Then, after a pause, he added in his lowest imperious tone, 'But you will please to observe that you are not to go near that house again. As my wife, you must take my word about what is proper for you. When you undertook to be Mrs. Grandcourt, you undertook not to make a fool of yourself. You have been making a fool of yourself this morning; and if you were to go on as you have begun, you might soon get yourself talked of at the clubs in a way you would not like. What do *you* know about the world? You have married *me*, and must be guided by my opinion.'

Every slow sentence of that speech had a terrific mastery in it for Gwendolen's nature. If the low tones had come from a physician telling her that her symptoms were those of a fatal disease, and prognosticating its course, she could not have been more helpless against the argument that lay in it. But she was permitted to move now, and her husband never again made any reference to what had occurred this morning. He knew the force of his own words. If this white-handed man with the perpendicular profile had been sent to govern a difficult colony, he might have won reputation among his contemporaries. He had certainly ability, would have understood that it was safer to exterminate than to cajole superseded proprietors, and would not have flinched from making things safe in that way.

Gwendolen did not, for all this, part with her recovered faith; - rather, she kept it with a more anxious tenacity, as a Protestant of old kept his bible hidden or a Catholic his crucifix, according to the side favored by the civil arm; and it was characteristic of her that apart from the impression gained concerning Deronda in that visit, her imagination was little occupied with Mirah or the eulogised brother. The one result established for her was, that Deronda had acted simply as a generous benefactor, and the phrase 'reading Hebrew' had fleeted unimpressively across her sense of hearing, as a stray stork might

have made its peculiar flight across her landscape without rousing any surprised reflection on its natural history.

But the issue of that visit, as it regarded her husband, took a strongly active part in the process which made an habitual conflict within her, and was the cause of some external change perhaps not observed by any one except Deronda. As the weeks went on bringing occasional transient interviews with her, he thought that he perceived in her an intensifying of her superficial hardness and resolute display, which made her abrupt betrayals of agitation the more marked and disturbing to him.

In fact, she was undergoing a sort of discipline for the refractory which, as little as possible like conversion, bends half the self with a terrible strain, and exasperates the unwillingness of the other half. Grandcourt had an active divination rather than discernment of refractoriness in her, and what had happened about Mirah quickened his suspicion that there was an increase of it dependent on the occasions when she happened to see Deronda: there was some 'confounded nonsense' between them: he did not imagine it exactly as flirtation, and his imagination in other branches was rather restricted; but it was nonsense that evidently kept up a kind of simmering in her mind - an inward action which might become disagreeable outward. Husbands in the old time are known to have suffered from a threatening devoutness in their wives, presenting itself first indistinctly as oddity, and ending in that mild form of lunatic asylum, a nunnery: Grandcourt had a vague perception of threatening moods in Gwendolen which the unity between them in his views of marriage required him peremptorily to check. Among the means he chose, one was peculiar, and was less ably calculated than the speeches we have just heard.

He determined that she should know the main purport of the will he was making, but he could not communicate this himself, because it involved the fact of his relation to Mrs. Glasher and her children; and that there should be any overt recognition of this between Gwendolen and himself was supremely repugnant to him. Like all proud, closely-wrapped natures, he shrank from explicitness and detail, even on trivialities, if they were personal: a valet must maintain a strict reserve with him on the subject of shoes and stockings. And clashing was intolerable to him; his habitual want was to put collision out of the question by the quiet massive pressure of his rule. But he wished Gwendolen to know that before he made her an offer it was no secret to him that she was aware of his relations with Lydia, her previous knowledge being the apology for bringing the subject before her now. Some men in his place might have thought of writing what he wanted her to know, in the form of a letter. But Grandcourt hated writing: even writing a note was a bore to him, and he had long been

accustomed to have all his writing done by Lush. We know that there are persons who will forego their own obvious interest rather than do anything so disagreeable as to write letters; and it is not probable that these imperfect utilitarians would rush into manuscript and syntax on a difficult subject in order to save another's feelings. To Grandcourt it did not even occur that he should, would, or could write to Gwendolen the information in question; and the only medium of communication he could use was Lush, who, to his mind, was as much of an implement as pen and paper. But here too Grandcourt had his reserves, and would not have uttered a word likely to encourage Lush in an impudent sympathy with any supposed grievance in a marriage which had been discommended by him. Who that has a confidant escapes believing too little in his penetration, and too much in his discretion? Grandcourt had always allowed Lush to know his external affairs indiscriminately - irregularities, debts, want of ready money; he had only used discrimination about what he would allow his confidant to say to him; and he had been so accustomed to this human tool, that the having him at call in London was a recovery of lost ease. It followed that Lush knew all the provisions of the will more exactly than they were known to the testator himself.

Grandcourt did not doubt that Gwendolen, since she was a woman who could put two and two together, knew or suspected Lush to be the contriver of her interview with Lydia, and that this was the reason why her first request was for his banishment. But the bent of a woman's inferences on mixed subjects which excites mixed passions is not determined by her capacity for simple addition; and here Grandcourt lacked the only organ of thinking that could have saved him from mistake - namely, some experience of the mixed passions concerned. He had correctly divined one-half of Gwendolen's dread - all that related to her personal pride, and her perception that his will must conquer hers; but the remorseful half, even if he had known of her broken promise, was as much out of his imagination as the other side of the moon. What he believed her to feel about Lydia was solely a tongue-tied jealousy, and what he believed Lydia to have written with the jewels was the fact that she had once been used to wearing them, with other amenities such as he imputed to the intercourse with jealous women. He had the triumphant certainty that he could aggravate the jealousy and yet smite it with a more absolute dumbness. His object was to engage all his wife's egoism on the same side as his own, and in his employment of Lush he did not intend an insult to her: she ought to understand that he was the only possible envoy. Grandcourt's view of things was considerably fenced in by his general sense, that what suited him others must put up with. There is no escaping the fact that want of sympathy condemns us to corresponding stupidity. Mephistopheles thrown upon real life, and obliged to manage his own plots, would inevitably make blunders.

One morning he went to Gwendolen in the boudoir beyond the back drawing- room, hat and gloves in hand, and said with his best-tempered, most persuasive drawl, standing before her and looking down on her as she sat with a book on her lap -

'A - Gwendolen, there's some business about property to be explained. I have told Lush to come and explain it to you. He knows all about these things. I am going out. He can come up now. He's the only person who can explain. I suppose you'll not mind.'

'You know that I do mind,' said Gwendolen, angrily, starting up. 'I shall not see him.' She showed the intention to dart away to the door. Grandcourt was before her, with his back toward it. He was prepared for her anger, and showed none in return, saying, with the same sort of remonstrant tone that he might have used about an objection to dining out -

'It's no use making a fuss. There are plenty of brutes in the world that one has to talk to. People with any *savoir vivre* don't make a fuss about such things. Some business must be done. You can't expect agreeable people to do it. If I employ Lush, the proper thing for you is to take it as a matter of course. Not to make a fuss about it. Not to toss your head and bite your lips about people of that sort.'

The drawling and the pauses with which this speech was uttered gave time for crowding reflections in Gwendolen, quelling her resistance. What was there to be told her about property? This word had certain dominant associations for her, first with her mother, then with Mrs. Glasher and her children. What would be the use if she refused to see Lush? Could she ask Grandcourt to tell her himself? That might be intolerable, even if he consented, which it was certain he would not, if he had made up his mind to the contrary. The humiliation of standing an obvious prisoner, with her husband barring the door, was not to be borne any longer, and she turned away to lean against a cabinet, while Grandcourt again moved toward her.

'I have arranged for Lush to come up now, while I am out,' he said, after a long organ stop, during which Gwendolen made no sign. 'Shall I tell him he may come?'

Yet another pause before she could say 'Yes' - her face turned obliquely and her eyes cast down.

'I shall come back in time to ride, if you like to get ready,' said Grandcourt. No answer. 'She is in a desperate rage,' thought he. But the rage was silent, and therefore not disagreeable to him. It followed that he turned her chin and kissed her, while she still kept her eyelids

down, and she did not move them until he was on the other side of the door.

What was she to do? Search where she would in her consciousness, she found no plea to justify a plaint. Any romantic allusions she had had in marrying this man had turned on her power of using him as she liked. He was using her as he liked.

She sat awaiting the announcement of Lush as a sort of searing operation that she had to go through. The facts that galled her gathered a burning power when she thought of their lying in his mind. It was all a part of that new gambling, in which the losing was not simply a *minus*, but a terrible *plus* that had never entered into her reckoning.

Lush was neither quite pleased nor quite displeased with his task. Grandcourt had said to him by way of conclusion, 'Don't make yourself more disagreeable than nature obliges you.'

'That depends,' thought Lush. But he said, 'I will write a brief abstract for Mrs. Grandcourt to read.' He did not suggest that he should make the whole communication in writing, which was a proof that the interview did not wholly displease him.

Some provision was being made for himself in the will, and he had no reason to be in a bad humor, even if a bad humor had been common with him. He was perfectly convinced that he had penetrated all the secrets of the situation; but he had no diabolical delight in it. He had only the small movements of gratified self-loving resentment in discerning that this marriage had fulfilled his own foresight in not being as satisfactory as the supercilious young lady had expected it to be, and as Grandcourt wished to feign that it was. He had no persistent spite much stronger than what gives the seasoning of ordinary scandal to those who repeat it and exaggerate it by their conjectures. With no active compassion or good- will, he had just as little active malevolence, being chiefly occupied in liking his particular pleasures, and not disliking anything but what hindered those pleasures - everything else ranking with the last murder and the last *opera bouffe*, under the head of things to talk about. Nevertheless, he was not indifferent to the prospect of being treated uncivilly by a beautiful woman, or to the counter-balancing fact that his present commission put into his hands an official power of humiliating her. He did not mean to use it needlessly; but there are some persons so gifted in relation to us that their 'How do you do?' seems charged with offense.

By the time that Mr Lush was announced, Gwendolen had braced herself to a bitter resolve that he should not witness the slightest

betrayal of her feeling, whatever he might have to tell. She invited him to sit down with stately quietude. After all, what was this man to her? He was not in the least like her husband. Her power of hating a coarse, familiar-mannered man, with clumsy hands, was now relaxed by the intensity with which she hated his contrast.

He held a small paper folded in his hand while he spoke.

'I need hardly say that I should not have presented myself if Mr Grandcourt had not expressed a strong wish to that effect - as no doubt he has mentioned to you.'

From some voices that speech might have sounded entirely reverential, and even timidly apologetic. Lush had no intention to the contrary, but to Gwendolen's ear his words had as much insolence in them as his prominent eyes, and the pronoun 'you' was too familiar. He ought to have addressed the folding-screen, and spoke of her as Mrs. Grandcourt. She gave the smallest sign of a bow, and Lush went on, with a little awkwardness, getting entangled in what is elegantly called tautology.

'My having been in Mr Grandcourt's confidence for fifteen years or more - since he was a youth, in fact - of course gives me a peculiar position. He can speak to me of affairs that he could not mention to any one else; and, in fact, he could not have employed any one else in this affair. I have accepted the task out of friendship for him. Which is my apology for accepting the task - if you would have preferred some one else.'

He paused, but she made no sign, and Lush, to give himself a countenance in an apology which met no acceptance, opened the folded paper, and looked at it vaguely before he began to speak again.

'This paper contains some information about Mr Grandcourt's will, an abstract of a part he wished you to know - if you'll be good enough to cast your eyes over it. But there is something I had to say by way of introduction - which I hope you'll pardon me for, if it's not quite agreeable.' Lush found that he was behaving better than he had expected, and had no idea how insulting he made himself with his 'not quite agreeable.'

'Say what you have to say without apologizing, please,' said Gwendolen, with the air she might have bestowed on a dog-stealer come to claim a reward for finding the dog he had stolen.

'I have only to remind you of something that occurred before your engagement to Mr Grandcourt,' said Lush, not without the rise of some willing insolence in exchange for her scorn. 'You met a lady in

Cardell Chase, if you remember, who spoke to you of her position with regard to Mr Grandcourt. She had children with her - one a very fine boy.'

Gwendolen's lips were almost as pale as her cheeks; her passion had no weapons - words were no better than chips. This man's speech was like a sharp knife-edge drawn across her skin: but even her indignation at the employment of Lush was getting merged in a crowd of other feelings, dim and alarming as a crowd of ghosts.

' Mr Grandcourt was aware that you were acquainted with this unfortunate affair beforehand, and he thinks it only right that his position and intentions should be made quite clear to you. It is an affair of property and prospects; and if there were any objection you had to make, if you would mention it to me - it is a subject which of course he would rather not speak about himself - if you will be good enough just to read this.' With the last words Lush rose and presented the paper to her.

When Gwendolen resolved that she would betray no feeling in the presence of this man, she had not prepared herself to hear that her husband knew the silent consciousness, the silently accepted terms on which she had married him. She dared not raise her hand to take the paper, least it should visibly tremble. For a moment Lush stood holding it toward her, and she felt his gaze on her as ignominy, before she could say even with low- toned haughtiness -

'Lay it on the table. And go into the next room, please.'

Lush obeyed, thinking as he took an easy-chair in the back drawing-room, 'My lady winces considerably. She didn't know what would be the charge for that superfine article, Henleigh Grandcourt.' But it seemed to him that a penniless girl had done better than she had any right to expect, and that she had been uncommonly knowing for her years and opportunities: her words to Lydia meant nothing, and her running away had probably been part of her adroitness. It had turned out a master-stroke.

Meanwhile Gwendolen was rallying her nerves to the reading of the paper. She must read it. Her whole being - pride, longing for rebellion, dreams of freedom, remorseful conscience, dread of fresh visitation - all made one need to know what the paper contained. But at first it was not easy to take in the meaning of the words. When she had succeeded, she found that in the case of there being no son as issue of her marriage, Grandcourt had made the small Henleigh his heir; that was all she cared to extract from the paper with any distinctness. The other statement as to what provision would be made for her in the same case, she hurried over, getting only a confused perception of

thousands and Gadsmere. It was enough. She could dismiss the man in the next room with the defiant energy which had revived in her at the idea that this question of property and inheritance was meant as a finish to her humiliations and her thraldom.

She thrust the paper between the leaves of her book, which she took in her hand, and walked with her stateliest air into the next room, where Lush immediately arose, awaiting her approach. When she was four yards from him, it was hardly an instant that she paused to say in a high tone, while she swept him with her eyelashes -

'Tell Mr Grandcourt that his arrangements are just what I desired' - passing on without haste, and leaving Lush time to mingle some admiration of her graceful back with that half-amused sense of her spirit and impertinence, which he expressed by raising his eyebrows and just thrusting his tongue between his teeth. He really did not want her to be worse punished, and he was glad to think that it was time to go and lunch at the club, where he meant to have a lobster salad.

What did Gwendolen look forward to? When her husband returned he found her equipped in her riding-dress, ready to ride out with him. She was not again going to be hysterical, or take to her bed and say she was ill. That was the implicit resolve adjusting her muscles before she could have framed it in words, as she walked out of the room, leaving Lush behind her. She was going to act in the spirit of her message, and not to give herself time to reflect. She rang the bell for her maid, and went with the usual care through her change of toilet. Doubtless her husband had meant to produce a great effect on her: by-and-by perhaps she would let him see an effect the very opposite of what he intended; but at present all that she could show was a defiant satisfaction in what had been presumed to be disagreeable. It came as an instinct rather than a thought, that to show any sign which could be interpreted as jealousy, when she had just been insultingly reminded that the conditions were what she had accepted with her eyes open, would be the worst self-humiliation. She said to herself that she had not time to-day to be clear about her future actions; all she could be clear about was that she would match her husband in ignoring any ground for excitement. She not only rode, but went out with him to dine, contributing nothing to alter their mutual manner, which was never that of rapid interchange in discourse; and curiously enough she rejected a handkerchief on which her maid had by mistake put the wrong scent - a scent that Grandcourt had once objected to. Gwendolen would not have liked to be an object of disgust to this husband whom she hated: she liked all disgust to be on her side.

But to defer thought in this way was something like trying to talk without singing in her own ears. The thought that is bound up with our passion is as penetrative as air - everything is porous to it; bows, smiles, conversation, repartee, are mere honeycombs where such thoughts rushes freely, not always with a taste of honey. And without shutting herself up in any solitude, Gwendolen seemed at the end of nine or ten hours to have gone through a labyrinth of reflection, in which already the same succession of prospects had been repeated, the same fallacious outlets rejected, the same shrinking from the necessities of every course. Already she was undergoing some hardening effect from feeling that she was under eyes which saw her past actions solely in the light of her lowest motives. She lived back in the scenes of her courtship, with the new bitter consciousness of what had been in Grandcourt's mind - certain now, with her present experience of him, that he had a peculiar triumph in conquering her dumb repugnance, and that ever since their marriage he had had a cold exultation in knowing her fancied secret. Her imagination exaggerated every tyrannical impulse he was capable of. 'I will insist on being separated from him' - was her first darting determination; then, 'I will leave him whether he consents or not. If this boy becomes his heir, I have made an atonement.' But neither in darkness nor in daylight could she imagine the scenes which must carry out those determinations with the courage to feel them endurable. How could she run away to her own family - carry distress among them, and render herself an object of scandal in the society she had left behind her? What future lay before her as Mrs. Grandcourt gone back to her mother, who would be made destitute again by the rupture of the marriage for which one chief excuse had been that it had brought that mother a maintenance? She had lately been seeing her uncle and Anna in London, and though she had been saved from any difficulty about inviting them to stay in Grosvenor Square by their wish to be with Rex, who would not risk a meeting with her, the transient visit she had had from them helped now in giving stronger color to the picture of what it would be for her to take refuge in her own family. What could she say to justify her flight? Her uncle would tell her to go back. Her mother would cry. Her aunt and Anna would look at her with wondering alarm. Her husband would have power to compel her. She had absolutely nothing that she could allege against him in judicious or judicial ears. And to 'insist on separation!' That was an easy combination of words; but considered as an action to be executed against Grandcourt, it would be about as practicable as to give him a pliant disposition and a dread of other people's unwillingness. How was she to begin? What was she to say that would not be a condemnation of herself? 'If I am to have misery anyhow,' was the bitter refrain of her rebellious dreams, 'I had better have the misery that I can keep to myself.' Moreover, her capability of rectitude told her again and again that she had no right to complain of her contract, or to withdraw from it.

And always among the images that drove her back to submission was Deronda. The idea of herself separated from her husband, gave Deronda a changed, perturbing, painful place in her consciousness: instinctively she felt that the separation would be from him too, and in the prospective vision of herself as a solitary, dubiously-regarded woman, she felt some tingling bashfulness at the remembrance of her behavior towards him. The association of Deronda with a dubious position for herself was intolerable. And what would he say if he knew everything? Probably that she ought to bear what she had brought on herself, unless she were sure that she could make herself a better woman by taking any other course. And what sort of woman was she to be - solitary, sickened of life, looked at with a suspicious kind of pity? - even if she could dream of success in getting that dreary freedom. Mrs. Grandcourt 'run away' would be a more pitiable creature than Gwendolen Harleth condemned to teach the bishop's daughters, and to be inspected by Mrs. Mompert.

One characteristic trait in her conduct is worth mentioning. She would not look a second time at the paper Lush had given her; and before ringing for her maid she locked it up in a traveling-desk which was at hand, proudly resolved against curiosity about what was allotted to herself in connection with Gadsmere - feeling herself branded in the minds of her husband and his confidant with the meanness that would accept marriage and wealth on any conditions, however dishonorable and humiliating.

Day after day the same pattern of thinking was repeated. There came nothing to change the situation - no new elements in the sketch - only a recurrence which engraved it. The May weeks went on into June, and still Mrs. Grandcourt was outwardly in the same place, presenting herself as she was expected to do in the accustomed scenes, with the accustomed grace, beauty, and costume; from church at one end of the week, through all the scale of desirable receptions, to opera at the other. Church was not markedly distinguished in her mind from the other forms of self- presentation, for marriage had included no instruction that enabled her to connect liturgy and sermon with any larger order of the world than that of unexplained and perhaps inexplicable social fashions. While a laudable zeal was laboring to carry the light of spiritual law up the alleys where law is chiefly known as the policeman, the brilliant Mrs. Grandcourt, condescending a little to a fashionable rector and conscious of a feminine advantage over a learned dean, was, so far as pastoral care and religious fellowship were concerned, in as complete a solitude as a man in a lighthouse.

Can we wonder at the practical submission which hid her constructive rebellion? The combination is common enough, as we know from the number of persons who make us aware of it in their own case by a

clamorous unwearied statement of the reasons against their submitting to a situation which, on inquiry, we discover to be the least disagreeable within their reach. Poor Gwendolen had both too much and too little mental power and dignity to make herself exceptional. No wonder that Deronda now marked some hardening in a look and manner which were schooled daily to the suppression of feeling.

For example. One morning, riding in Rotten Row with Grandcourt by her side, she saw standing against the railing at the turn, just facing them, a dark-eyed lady with a little girl and a blonde boy, whom she at once recognized as the beings in all the world the most painful for her to behold. She and Grandcourt had just slackened their pace to a walk; he being on the outer side was the nearer to the unwelcome vision, and Gwendolen had not presence of mind to do anything but glance away from the dark eyes that met hers piercingly toward Grandcourt, who wheeled past the group with an unmoved face, giving no sign of recognition.

Immediately she felt a rising rage against him mingling with her shame for herself, and the words, 'You might at least have raised your hat to her,' flew impetuously to her lips - but did not pass them. If as her husband, in her company, he chose to ignore these creatures whom she herself had excluded from the place she was filling, how could she be the person to reproach him? She was dumb.

It was not chance, but her own design, that had brought Mrs. Glasher there with her boy. She had come to town under the pretext of making purchases - really wanting educational apparatus for her children, and had had interviews with Lush in which she had not refused to soothe her uneasy mind by representing the probabilities as all on the side of her ultimate triumph. Let her keep quiet, and she might live to see the marriage dissolve itself in one way or other - Lush hinted at several ways - leaving the succession assured to her boy. She had had an interview with Grandcourt, too, who had as usual told her to behave like a reasonable woman, and threatened punishment if she were troublesome; but had, also as usual, vindicated himself from any wish to be stingy, the money he was receiving from Sir Hugo on account of Diplow encouraging him to be lavish. Lydia, feeding on the probabilities in her favor, devoured her helpless wrath along with that pleasanter nourishment; but she could not let her discretion go entirely without the reward of making a Medusa-apparition before Gwendolen, vindictiveness and jealousy finding relief in an outlet of venom, though it were as futile as that of a viper already flung on the other side of the hedge. Hence, each day, after finding out from Lush the likely time for Gwendolen to be riding, she had watched at that post, daring Grandcourt so far. Why should she not take little Henleigh into the Park?

The Medusa-apparition was made effective beyond Lydia's conception by the shock it gave Gwendolen actually to see Grandcourt ignoring this woman who had once been the nearest in the world to him, along with the children she had borne him. And all the while the dark shadow thus cast on the lot of a woman destitute of acknowledged social dignity, spread itself over her visions of a future that might be her own, and made part of her dread on her own behalf. She shrank all the more from any lonely action. What possible release could there be for her from this hated vantage ground, which yet she dared not quit, any more than if fire had been raining outside it? What release, but death? Not her own death. Gwendolen was not a woman who could easily think of her own death as a near reality, or front for herself the dark entrance on the untried and invisible. It seemed more possible that Grandcourt should die: - and yet not likely. The power of tyranny in him seemed a power of living in the presence of any wish that he should die. The thought that his death was the only possible deliverance for her was one with the thought that deliverance would never come - the double deliverance from the injury with which other beings might reproach her and from the yoke she had brought on her own neck. No! she foresaw him always living, and her own life dominated by him; the ‘always’ of her young experience not stretching beyond the few immediate years that seemed immeasurably long with her passionate weariness. The thought of his dying would not subsist: it turned as with a dream-change into the terror that she should die with his throttling fingers on her neck avenging that thought. Fantasies moved within her like ghosts, making no break in her more acknowledged consciousness and finding no obstruction in it: dark rays doing their work invisibly in the broad light.

Only an evening or two after that encounter in the Park, there was a grand concert at Klesmer's, who was living rather magnificently now in one of the large houses in Grosvenor Place, a patron and prince among musical professors. Gwendolen had looked forward to this occasion as one on which she was sure to meet Deronda, and she had been meditating how to put a question to him which, without containing a word that she would feel a dislike to utter, would yet be explicit enough for him to understand it. The struggle of opposite feelings would not let her abide by her instinct that the very idea of Deronda's relation to her was a discouragement to any desperate step towards freedom. The next wave of emotion was a longing for some word of his to enforce a resolve. The fact that her opportunities of conversation with him had always to be snatched in the doubtful privacy of large parties, caused her to live through them many times beforehand, imagining how they would take place and what she would say. The irritation was proportionate when no opportunity came; and this evening at Klesmer's she included Deronda in her anger, because he looked as calm as possible at a distance from her, while she was in danger of betraying her impatience to every one who spoke to her. She

found her only safety in a chill haughtiness which made Mr Vandernoodt remark that Mrs. Grandcourt was becoming a perfect match for her husband. When at last the chances of the evening brought Deronda near her, Sir Hugo and Mrs. Raymond were close by and could hear every word she said. No matter: her husband was not near, and her irritation passed without check into a fit of daring which restored the security of her self-possession. Deronda was there at last, and she would compel him to do what she pleased. Already and without effort rather queenly in her air as she stood in her white lace and green leaves she threw a royal permissiveness into her way of saying, 'I wish you would come and see me to-morrow between five and six, Mr Deronda.'

There could be but one answer at that moment: 'Certainly,' with a tone of obedience.

Afterward it occurred to Deronda that he would write a note to excuse himself. He had always avoided making a call at Grandcourt's. He could not persuade himself to any step that might hurt her, and whether his excuse were taken for indifference or for the affectation of indifference it would be equally wounding. He kept his promise. Gwendolen had declined to ride out on the plea of not feeling well enough having left her refusal to the last moment when the horses were soon to be at the door - not without alarm lest her husband should say that he too would stay at home. Become almost superstitious about his power of suspicious divination, she had a glancing forethought of what she would do in that case - namely, have herself denied as not well. But Grandcourt accepted her excuse without remark, and rode off.

Nevertheless when Gwendolen found herself alone, and had sent down the order that only Mr Deronda was to be admitted, she began to be alarmed at what she had done, and to feel a growing agitation in the thought that he would soon appear, and she should soon be obliged to speak: not of trivialities, as if she had no serious motive in asking him to come: and yet what she had been for hours determining to say began to seem impossible. For the first time the impulse of appeal to him was being checked by timidity, and now that it was too late she was shaken by the possibility that he might think her invitation unbecoming. If so, she would have sunk in his esteem. But immediately she resist ed this intolerable fear as an infection from her husband's way of thinking. That *he* would say she was making a fool of herself was rather a reason why such a judgment would be remote from Deronda's mind. But that she could not rid herself from this sudden invasion of womanly reticence was manifest in a kind of action which had never occurred to her before. In her struggle between agitation and the effort to suppress it, she was walking up and down the length of the two drawing-rooms, where at one end a long mirror

reflected her in her black dress, chosen in the early morning with a half-admitted reference to this hour. But above this black dress her head on its white pillar of a neck showed to advantage. Some consciousness of this made her turn hastily and hurry to the boudoir, where again there was a glass, but also, tossed over a chair, a large piece of black lace which she snatched and tied over her crown of hair so as completely to conceal her neck, and leave only her face looking out from the black frame. In this manifest contempt of appearance, she thought it possible to be freer from nervousness, but the black lace did not take away the uneasiness from her eyes and lips.

She was standing in the middle of the room when Deronda was announced, and as he approached her she perceived that he too for some reason was not his usual self. She could not have defined the change except by saying that he looked less happy than usual, and appeared to be under some effort in speaking to her. And yet the speaking was the slightest possible. They both said, 'How do you do?' quite curtly; and Gwendolen, instead of sitting down, moved to a little distance, resting her arms slightly on the tall back of a chair, while Deronda stood where he was, - both feeling it difficult to say any more, though the preoccupation in his mind could hardly have been more remote than it was from Gwendolen's conception. She naturally saw in his embarrassment some reflection of her own. Forced to speak, she found all her training in concealment and self-command of no use to her and began with timid awkwardness -

'You will wonder why. I begged you to come. I wanted to ask you something. You said I was ignorant. That is true. And what can I do but ask you?'

And at this moment she was feeling it utterly impossible to put the questions she had intended. Something hew in her nervous manner roused Deronda's anxiety lest there might be a new crisis. He said with the sadness of affection in his voice -

'My only regret is, that I can be of so little use to you.' The words and the tone touched a new spring in her, and she went on with more sense of freedom, yet still not saying anything she had designed to say, and beginning to hurry, that she might somehow arrive at the right words.

'I wanted to tell you that I have always been thinking of your advice, but is it any use? - I can't make myself different, because things about me raise bad feelings - and I must go on - I can alter nothing - it is no use.'

She paused an instant, with the consciousness that she was not finding the right words, but began again hurriedly, 'But if I go on I

shall get worse. I want not to get worse. I should like to be what you wish. There are people who are good and enjoy great things - I know there are. I am a contemptible creature. I feel as if I should get wicked with hating people. I have tried to think that I would go away from everybody. But I can't. There are so many things to hinder me. You think, perhaps, that I don't mind. But I do mind. I am afraid of everything. I am afraid of getting wicked. Tell me what I can do.'

She had forgotten everything but that image of her helpless misery which she was trying to make present to Deronda in broken allusive speech - wishing to convey but not express all her need. Her eyes were tearless, and had a look of smarting in their dilated brilliancy; there was a subdued sob in her voice which was more and more veiled, till it was hardly above a whisper. She was hurting herself with the jewels that glittered on her tightly-clasped fingers pressed against her heart.

The feeling Deronda endured in these moments he afterward called horrible. Words seemed to have no more rescue in them than if he had been beholding a vessel in peril of wreck - the poor ship with its many-lived anguish beaten by the inescapable storm. How could he grasp the long-growing process of this young creature's wretchedness? - how arrest and change it with a sentence? He was afraid of his own voice. The words that rushed into his mind seemed in their feebleness nothing better than despair made audible, or than that insensibility to another's hardship which applies precept to soothe pain. He felt himself holding a crowd of words imprisoned within his lips, as if the letting them escape would be a violation of awe before the mysteries of our human lot. The thought that urged itself foremost was - 'Confess everything to your husband; have nothing concealed:' - the words carried in his mind a vision of reasons which would have needed much fuller expressions for Gwendolen to apprehend them, but before he had begun those brief sentences, the door opened and the husband entered.

Grandcourt had deliberately gone out and turned back to satisfy a suspicion. What he saw was Gwendolen's face of anguish framed black like a nun's, and Deronda standing three yards from her with a look of sorrow such as he might have bent on the last struggle of life in a beloved object. Without any show of surprise Grandcourt nodded to Deronda, gave a second look at Gwendolen, passed on, and seated himself easily at a little distance crossing his legs, taking out his handkerchief and trifling with it elegantly.

Gwendolen had shrunk and changed her attitude on seeing him, but she did not turn or move from her place. It was not a moment in which she could feign anything, or manifest any strong revulsion of feeling: the passionate movement of her last speech was still too

strong within her. What she felt beside was a dull despairing sense that her interview with Deronda was at an end: a curtain had fallen. But he, naturally, was urged into self-possession and effort by susceptibility to what might follow for her from being seen by her husband in this betrayal of agitation; and feeling that any pretence of ease in prolonging his visit would only exaggerate Grandcourt's possible conjectures of duplicity, he merely said -

'I will not stay longer now. Good bye.'

He put out his hand, and she let him press her poor little chill fingers; but she said no good-bye.

When he had left the room, Gwendolen threw herself into a seat, with an expectation as dull as her despair - the expectation that she was going to be punished. But Grandcourt took no notice: he was satisfied to have let her know that she had not deceived him, and to keep a silence which was formidable with omniscience. He went out that evening, and her plea of feeling ill was accepted without even a sneer.

The next morning at breakfast he said, 'I am going yachting to the Mediterranean.'

'When?' said Gwendolen, with a leap of heart which had hope in it.

'The day after to-morrow. The yacht is at Marseilles. Lush is gone to get everything ready.'

'Shall I have mamma to stay with me, then?' said Gwendolen, the new sudden possibility of peace and affection filling her mind like a burst of morning light.

'No; you will go with me.'