

## Chapter LXI

'Within the gentle heart Love shelters him, As birds within the green shade of the grove. Before the gentle heart, in Nature's scheme, Love was not, nor the gentle heart ere Love.' - GUIDO GUNICELLI (*Rossetti's Translation*).

There was another house besides the white house at Pennicote, another breast besides Rex Gascoigne's, in which the news of Grandcourt's death caused both strong agitation and the effort to repress it.

It was Hans Meyrick's habit to send or bring in the *Times* for his mother's reading. She was a great reader of news, from the widest-reaching politics to the list of marriages; the latter, she said, giving her the pleasant sense of finishing the fashionable novels without having read them, and seeing the heroes and heroines happy without knowing what poor creatures they were. On a Wednesday, there were reasons why Hans always chose to bring the paper, and to do so about the time that Mirah had nearly ended giving Mab her weekly lesson, avowing that he came then because he wanted to hear Mirah sing. But on the particular Wednesday now in question, after entering the house as quietly as usual with his latch-key, he appeared in the parlor, shaking the *Times* aloft with a crackling noise, in remorseless interruption of Mab's attempt to render *Lascia ch'io pianga* with a remote imitation of her teacher. Piano and song ceased immediately; Mirah, who had been playing the accompaniment, involuntarily started up and turned round, the crackling sound, after the occasional trick of sounds, having seemed to her something thunderous; and Mab said -

'O-o-o, Hans! why do you bring a more horrible noise than my singing?'

'What on earth is the wonderful news?' said Mrs. Meyrick, who was the only other person in the room. 'Anything about Italy - anything about the Austrians giving up Venice?'

'Nothing about Italy, but something from Italy,' said Hans, with a peculiarity in his tone and manner which set his mother interpreting. Imagine how some of us feel and behave when an event, not disagreeable seems to be confirming and carrying out our private constructions. We say, 'What do you think?' in a pregnant tone to some innocent person who has not embarked his wisdom in the same boat with ours, and finds our information flat.

'Nothing bad?' said Mrs. Meyrick anxiously, thinking immediately of Deronda; and Mirah's heart had been already clutched by the same thought.

'Not bad for anybody we care much about,' said Hans, quickly; 'rather uncommonly lucky, I think. I never knew anybody die conveniently before. Considering what a dear gazelle I am, I am constantly wondering to find myself alive.'

'Oh me, Hans!' said Mab, impatiently, 'if you must talk of yourself, let it be behind your own back. What *is* it that has happened?'

'Duke Alfonso is drowned, and the Duchess is alive, that's all,' said Hans, putting the paper before Mrs. Meyrick, with his finger against a paragraph. 'But more than all is - Deronda was at Genoa in the same hotel with them, and he saw her brought in by the fishermen who had got her out of the water time enough to save her from any harm. It seems they saw her jump in after her husband, which was a less judicious action than I should have expected of the Duchess. However Deronda is a lucky fellow in being there to take care of her.'

Mirah had sunk on the music stool again, with her eyelids down and her hands tightly clasped; and Mrs. Meyrick, giving up the paper to Mab, said -

'Poor thing! she must have been fond of her husband to jump in after him.'

'It was an inadvertence - a little absence of mind,' said Hans, creasing his face roguishly, and throwing himself into a chair not far from Mirah. 'Who can be fond of a jealous baritone, with freezing glances, always singing asides? - that was the husband's *role*, depend upon it. Nothing can be neater than his getting drowned. The Duchess is at liberty now to marry a man with a fine head of hair, and glances that will melt instead of freezing her. And I shall be invited to the wedding.'

Here Mirah started from her sitting posture, and fixing her eyes on Hans, with an angry gleam in them, she said, in a deeply-shaken voice of indignation -

'Mr Hans, you ought not to speak in that way. Mr Deronda would not like you to speak so. Why will you say he is lucky - why will you use words of that sort about life and death - when what is life to one is death to another? How do you know it would be lucky if he loved Mrs. Grandcourt? It might be a great evil to him. She would take him away from my brother - I know she would. Mr Deronda would not call that lucky to pierce my brother's heart.'

All three were struck with the sudden transformation. Mirah's face, with a look of anger that might have suited Ithuriel, pale, even to the lips that were usually so rich of tint, was not far from poor Hans, who sat transfixed, blushing under it as if he had been a girl, while he said, nervously -

'I am a fool and a brute, and I withdraw every word. I'll go and hang myself like Judas - if it's allowable to mention him.' Even in Hans's sorrowful moments, his improvised words had inevitably some drollery.

But Mirah's anger was not appeased: how could it be? She had burst into indignant speech as creatures in intense pain bite and make their teeth meet even through their own flesh, by way of making their agony bearable. She said no more, but, seating herself at the piano, pressed the sheet of music before her, as if she thought of beginning to play again.

It was Mab who spoke, while. Mrs. Meyrick's face seemed to reflect some of Hans' discomfort.

'Mirah is quite right to scold you, Hans. You are always taking Mr Deronda's name in vain. And it is horrible, joking in that way about his marrying Mrs. Grandcourt. Men's minds must be very black, I think,' ended Mab, with much scorn.

'Quite true, my dear,' said Hans, in a low tone, rising and turning on his heel to walk toward the back window.

'We had better go on, Mab; you have not given your full time to the lesson,' said Mirah, in a higher tone than usual. 'Will you sing this again, or shall I sing it to you?'

'Oh, please sing it to me,' said Mab, rejoiced to take no more notice of what had happened.

And Mirah immediately sang *Lascia ch'io pianga*, giving forth its melodious sobs and cries with new fullness and energy. Hans paused in his walk and leaned against the mantel-piece, keeping his eyes carefully away from his mother's. When Mirah had sung her last note and touched the last chord, she rose and said, 'I must go home now. Ezra expects me.'

She gave her hand silently to Mrs. Meyrick and hung back a little, not daring to look at her, instead of kissing her, as usual. But the little mother drew Mirah's face down to hers, and said, soothingly, 'God bless you, my dear.' Mirah felt that she had committed an offense against Mrs. Meyrick by angrily rebuking Hans, and mixed with the

rest of her suffering was the sense that she had shown something like a proud ingratitude, an unbecoming assertion of superiority. And her friend had divined this compunction.

Meanwhile Hans had seized his wide-awake, and was ready to open the door.

'Now, Hans,' said Mab, with what was really a sister's tenderness cunningly disguised, 'you are not going to walk home with Mirah. I am sure she would rather not. You are so dreadfully disagreeable to-day.'

'I shall go to take care of her, if she does not forbid me,' said Hans, opening the door.

Mirah said nothing, and when he had opened the outer door for her and closed it behind him, he walked by her side unforbidden. She had not the courage to begin speaking to him again - conscious that she had perhaps been unbecomingly severe in her words to him, yet finding only severer words behind them in her heart. Besides, she was pressed upon by a crowd of thoughts thrusting themselves forward as interpreters of that consciousness which still remained unaltered to herself.

Hans, on his side, had a mind equally busy. Mirah's anger had waked in him a new perception, and with it the unpleasant sense that he was a dolt not to have had it before. Suppose Mirah's heart were entirely preoccupied with Deronda in another character than that of her own and her brother's benefactor; the supposition was attended in Hans's mind with anxieties which, to do him justice, were not altogether selfish. He had a strong persuasion, which only direct evidence to the contrary could have dissipated, and that was that there was a serious attachment between Deronda and Mrs. Grandcourt; he had pieced together many fragments of observation, and gradually gathered knowledge, completed by what his sisters had heard from Anna Gascoigne, which convinced him not only that Mrs. Grandcourt had a passion for Deronda, but also, notwithstanding his friend's austere self-repression, that Deronda's susceptibility about her was the sign of concealed love. Some men, having such a conviction, would have avoided allusions that could have roused that susceptibility; but Hans's talk naturally fluttered toward mischief, and he was given to a form of experiment on live animals which consisted in irritating his friends playfully. His experiments had ended in satisfying him that what he thought likely was true.

On the other hand, any susceptibility Deronda had manifested about a lover's attentions being shown to Mirah, Hans took to be sufficiently accounted for by the alleged reason, namely, her dependent position; for he credited his friend with all possible unselfish anxiety for those

whom he could rescue and protect. And Deronda's insistence that Mirah would never marry one who was not a Jew necessarily seemed to exclude himself, since Hans shared the ordinary opinion, which he knew nothing to disturb, that Deronda was the son of Sir Hugo Mallinger.

Thus he felt himself in clearness about the state of Deronda's affections; but now, the events which really struck him as concurring toward the desirable union with Mrs. Grandcourt, had called forth a flash of revelation from Mirah - a betrayal of her passionate feeling on this subject which had made him melancholy on her account as well as his own - yet on the whole less melancholy than if he had imagined Deronda's hopes fixed on her. It is not sublime, but it is common, for a man to see the beloved object unhappy because his rival loves another, with more fortitude and a milder jealousy than if he saw her entirely happy in his rival. At least it was so with the mercurial Hans, who fluctuated between the contradictory states of feeling, wounded because Mirah was wounded, and of being almost obliged to Deronda for loving somebody else. It was impossible for him to give Mirah any direct sign of the way in which he had understood her anger, yet he longed that his speechless companionship should be eloquent in a tender, penitent sympathy which is an admissible form of wooing a bruised heart.

Thus the two went side by side in a companionship that yet seemed an agitated communication, like that of two chords whose quick vibrations lie outside our hearing. But when they reached the door of Mirah's home, and Hans said 'Good-bye,' putting out his hand with an appealing look of penitence, she met the look with melancholy gentleness, and said, 'Will you not come in and see my brother?'

Hans could not but interpret this invitation as a sign of pardon. He had not enough understanding of what Mirah's nature had been wrought into by her early experience, to divine how the very strength of her late excitement had made it pass more quickly into the resolute acceptance of pain. When he had said, 'If you will let me,' and they went in together, half his grief was gone, and he was spinning a little romance of how his devotion might make him indispensable to Mirah in proportion as Deronda gave his devotion elsewhere. This was quite fair, since his friend was provided for according to his own heart; and on the question of Judaism Hans felt thoroughly fortified: - who ever heard in tale or history that a woman's love went in the track of her race and religion? Moslem and Jewish damsels were always attracted toward Christians, and now if Mirah's heart had gone forth too precipitately toward Deronda, here was another case in point. Hans was wont to make merry with his own arguments, to call himself a Giaour, and antithesis the sole clue to events; but he believed a little

in what he laughed at. And thus his bird-like hope, constructed on the lightest principles, soared again in spite of heavy circumstances.

They found Mordecai looking singularly happy, holding a closed letter in his hand, his eyes glowing with a quiet triumph which in his emaciated face gave the idea of a conquest over assailing death. After the greeting between him and Hans, Mirah put her arm round her brother's neck and looked down at the letter in his hand, without the courage to ask about it, though she felt sure that it was the cause of his happiness.

'A letter from Daniel Deronda,' said Mordecai, answering her look. 'Brief - only saying that he hopes soon to return. Unexpected claims have detained him. The promise of seeing him again is like the bow in the cloud to me,' continued Mordecai, looking at Hans; 'and to you it must be a gladness. For who has two friends like him?'

While Hans was answering Mirah slipped away to her own room; but not to indulge in any outburst of the passion within her. If the angels, once supposed to watch the toilet of women, had entered the little chamber with her and let her shut the door behind them, they would only have seen her take off her hat, sit down and press her hands against her temples as if she had suddenly reflected that her head ached; then rise to dash cold water on her eyes and brow and hair till her backward curls were full of crystal beads, while she had dried her brow and looked out like a freshly-opened flower from among the dewy tresses of the woodland; then give deep sighs of relief, and putting on her little slippers, sit still after that action for a couple of minutes, which seemed to her so long, so full of things to come, that she rose with an air of recollection, and went down to make tea.

Something of the old life had returned. She had been used to remember that she must learn her part, must go to rehearsal, must act and sing in the evening, must hide her feelings from her father; and the more painful her life grew, the more she had been used to hide. The force of her nature had long found its chief action in resolute endurance, and to-day the violence of feeling which had caused the first jet of anger had quickly transformed itself into a steady facing of trouble, the well-known companion of her young years. But while she moved about and spoke as usual, a close observer might have discerned a difference between this apparent calm, which was the effect of restraining energy, and the sweet genuine calm of the months when she first felt a return of her infantine happiness.

Those who have been indulged by fortune and have always thought of calamity as what happens to others, feel a blind incredulous rage at the reversal of their lot, and half believe that their wild cries will alter

the course of the storm. Mirah felt no such surprise when familiar Sorrow came back from brief absence, and sat down with her according to the old use and wont. And this habit of expecting trouble rather than joy, hindered her from having any persistent belief in opposition to the probabilities which were not merely suggested by Hans, but were supported by her own private knowledge and long-growing presentiment. An attachment between Deronda and Mrs. Grandcourt, to end in their future marriage, had the aspect of a certainty for her feeling. There had been no fault in him: facts had ordered themselves so that there was a tie between him and this woman who belonged to another world than hers and Ezra's - nay, who seemed another sort of being than Deronda, something foreign that would be a disturbance in his life instead of blending with it. Well, well - but if it could have been deferred so as to make no difference while Ezra was there! She did not know all the momentousness of the relation between Deronda and her brother, but she had seen, and instinctively felt enough to forebode its being incongruous with any close tie to Mrs. Grandcourt; at least this was the clothing that Mirah first gave to her mortal repugnance. But in the still, quick action of her consciousness, thoughts went on like changing states of sensation unbroken by her habitual acts; and this inward language soon said distinctly that the mortal repugnance would remain even if Ezra were secured from loss.

'What I have read about and sung about and seen acted, is happening to me - this that I am feeling is the love that makes jealousy;' so impartially Mirah summed up the charge against herself. But what difference could this pain of hers make to any one else? It must remain as exclusively her own, and hidden, as her early yearning and devotion to her lost mother. But unlike that devotion, it was something that she felt to be a misfortune of her nature - a discovery that what should have been pure gratitude and reverence had sunk into selfish pain, that the feeling she had hitherto delighted to pour out in words was degraded into something she was ashamed to betray - an absurd longing that she who had received all and given nothing should be of importance where she was of no importance - an angry feeling toward another woman who possessed the good she wanted. But what notion, what vain reliance could it be that had lain darkly within her and was now burning itself into sight as disappointment and jealousy? It was as if her soul had been steeped in poisonous passion by forgotten dreams of deep sleep, and now flamed out in this unaccountable misery. For with her waking reason she had never entertained what seemed the wildly unfitting thought that Deronda could love her. The uneasiness she had felt before had been comparatively vague and easily explained as part of a general regret that he was only a visitant in her and her brother's world, from which the world where his home lay was as different as a portico with lights and lacqueys was different from the door of a tent, where the only

splendor came from the mysterious inaccessible stars. But her feeling was no longer vague: the cause of her pain - the image of Mrs. Grandcourt by Deronda's side, drawing him farther and farther into the distance, was as definite as pincers on her flesh. In the Psychemould of Mirah's frame there rested a fervid quality of emotion, sometimes rashly supposed to require the bulk of a Cleopatra; her impressions had the thoroughness and tenacity that give to the first selection of passionate feeling the character of a lifelong faithfulness. And now a selection had declared itself, which gave love a cruel heart of jealousy: she had been used to a strong repugnance toward certain objects that surrounded her, and to walk inwardly aloof from them while they touched her sense. And now her repugnance concentrated itself on Mrs. Grandcourt, of whom she involuntarily conceived more evil than she knew. 'I could bear everything that used to be - but this is worse - this is worse, - I used not to have horrible feelings!' said the poor child in a loud whisper to her pillow. Strange that she should have to pray against any feeling which concerned Deronda!

But this conclusion had been reached through an evening spent in attending to Mordecai, whose exaltation of spirit in the prospect of seeing his friend again, disposed him to utter many thoughts aloud to Mirah, though such communication was often interrupted by intervals apparently filled with an inward utterance that animated his eyes and gave an occasional silent action to his lips. One thought especially occupied him.

'Seest thou, Mirah,' he said once, after a long silence, 'the *Shemah*, wherein we briefly confess the divine Unity, is the chief devotional exercise of the Hebrew; and this made our religion the fundamental religion for the whole world; for the divine Unity embraced as its consequence the ultimate unity of mankind. See, then - the nation which has been scoffed at for its separateness, has given a binding theory to the human race. Now, in complete unity a part possesses the whole as the whole possesses every part: and in this way human life is tending toward the image of the Supreme Unity: for as our life becomes more spiritual by capacity of thought, and joy therein, possession tends to become more universal, being independent of gross material contact; so that in a brief day the soul of man may know in fuller volume the good which has been and is, nay, is to come, than all he could possess in a whole life where he had to follow the creeping paths of the senses. In this moment, my sister, I hold the joy of another's future within me: a future which these eyes will not see, and which my spirit may not then recognize as mine. I recognize it now, and love it so, that I can lay down this poor life upon its altar and say: 'Burn, burn indiscernibly into that which shall be, which is my love and not me.' Dost thou understand, Mirah?'

'A little,' said Mirah, faintly, 'but my mind is too poor to have felt it.'

'And yet,' said Mordecai, rather insistently, 'women are specially framed for the love which feels possession in renouncing, and is thus a fit image of what I mean. Somewhere in the later *Midrash*, I think, is the story of a Jewish maiden who loved a Gentile king so well, that this was what she did: - she entered into prison and changed clothes with the woman who was beloved by the king, that she might deliver that woman from death by dying in her stead, and leave the king to be happy in his love which was not for her. This is the surpassing love, that loses self in the object of love.'

'No, Ezra, no,' said Mirah, with low-toned intensity, 'that was not it. She wanted the king when she was dead to know what she had done, and feel that she was better than the other. It was her strong self, wanting to conquer, that made her die.'

Mordecai was silent a little, and then argued -

'That might be, Mirah. But if she acted so, believing the king would never know.'

'You can make the story so in your mind, Ezra, because you are great, and like to fancy the greatest that could be. But I think it was not really like that. The Jewish girl must have had jealousy in her heart, and she wanted somehow to have the first place in the king's mind. That is what she would die for.'

'My sister, thou hast read too many plays, where the writers delight in showing the human passions as indwelling demons, unmixed with the relenting and devout elements of the soul. Thou judgest by the plays, and not by thy own heart, which is like our mother's.'

Mirah made no answer.