that make human agonies are often a mere whisper in the roar of hurrying existence. There are glances of hatred that stab and raise no cry of murder; robberies that leave man or woman for ever beggared of peace and joy, yet kept secret by the sufferer - committed to no sound except that of low moans in the night, seen in no writing except that made on the face by the slow months of suppressed anguish and early morning tears. Many an inherited sorrow that has marred a life has been breathed into no human ear.

The poets have told us of a dolorous enchanted forest in the under world. The thorn-bushes there, and the thick-barked stems, have human histories hidden in them; the power of unuttered cries dwells in the passionless-seeming branches, and the red warm blood is darkly feeding the quivering nerves of a sleepless memory that watches through all dreams. These things are a parable.

Chapter 1

He left me when the down upon his lip Lay like the shadow of a hovering kiss. 'Beautiful mother, do not grieve,' he said; 'I will be great, and build our fortunes high, And you shall wear the longest train at court, And look so queenly, all the lords shall say, ‘She is a royal changeling: there's some crown Lacks the right head, since hers wears nought but braids.’ ' O, he is coming now - but I am grey; And he -

ON the 1st of September, in the memorable year 1832, some one was expected at Transome Court. As early as two o'clock in the afternoon the aged lodge-keeper had opened the heavy gate, green as the tree trunks were green with nature's powdery paint, deposited year after year. Already in the village of Little Treby, which lay on the side of a steep hill not far off the lodge gates, the elder matrons sat in their best gowns at the few cottage doors bordering the road, that they might be ready to get up and make their curtsy when a travelling carriage should come in sight; and beyond the village several small boys were stationed on the lookout, intending to run a race to the barn-like old church, where the sexton waited in the belfry ready to set the one bell in joyful agitation just at the right moment.

The old lodge-keeper had opened the gate and left it in the charge of his lame wife, because he was wanted at the Court to sweep away the leaves, and perhaps to help in the stables. For though Transome Court was a large mansion, built in the fashion of Queen Anne's time, with a park and grounds as fine as any to be seen in Loamshire, there were very few servants about it. Especially, it seemed, there must be a lack of gardeners; for, except on the terrace surrounded with a stone parapet in front of the house, where there was a parterre kept with some neatness, grass had spread itself over the gravel walks, and over

all the low mounds once carefully cut as black beds for the shrubs and larger plants. Many of the windows had the shutters closed, and under the grand Scotch fir that stooped towards one corner, the brown fir-needles of many years lay in a small stone balcony in front of two such darkened windows. All round, both near and far, there were grand trees, motionless in the still sunshine, and, like all large motionless things, seeming to add to the stillness. Here and there a leaf fluttered down; petals fell in a silent shower; a heavy moth floated by, and, when it settled, seemed to fall wearily; the tiny birds alighted on the walks, and hopped about in perfect tranquillity; even a stray rabbit sat nibbling a leaf that was to its liking, in the middle of a grassy space, with an air that seemed quite impudent in so timid a creature. No sound was to be heard louder than a sleepy hum, and the soft monotony of running water hurrying on to the river that divided the park. Standing on the south or east side of the house, you would never have guessed that an arrival was expected.

But on the west side, where the carriage entrance was, the gates under the stone archway were thrown open; and so was the double door of the entrance-hall, letting in the warm light on the scagliola pillars, the marble statues, and the broad stone staircase, with its matting worn into large holes. And, stronger sign of expectation than all, from one of the doors which surrounded the entrance-hall, there came forth from time to time a lady, who walked lightly over the polished stone floor, and stood on the doorsteps and watched and listened. She walked lightly, for her figure was slim and finely formed, though she was between fifty and sixty. She was a tall, proud-looking woman, with abundant grey hair, dark eyes and eyebrows, and a somewhat eagle-like yet not unfeminine face. Her tight-fitting black dress was much worn; the fine lace of her cuffs and collar, and of the small veil which fell backwards over her high comb, was visibly mended; but rare jewels flashed on her hands, which lay on her folded black-clad arms like finely cut onyx cameos.

Many times Mrs Transome went to the doorsteps, watching and listening in vain. Each time she returned to the same room: it was a moderate-sized comfortable room, with low ebony bookshelves round it, and it formed an anteroom to a large library, of which a glimpse could be seen through an open doorway, partly obstructed by a heavy tapestry curtain drawn on one side. There was a great deal of tarnished gilding and dinginess on the walls and furniture of this smaller room, but the pictures above the bookcases were all of a cheerful kind: portraits in pastel of pearly-skinned ladies with hair-powder; blue ribbons, and low-bodices; a splendid portrait in oils of a Transome in the gorgeous dress of the Restoration; another of a Transome in his boyhood, with his hand on the neck of a small pony; and a large Flemish battle-piece, where war seemed only a picturesque blue-and-red accident in a vast sunny expanse of plain

and sky. Probably such cheerful pictures had been chosen because this was Mrs Transome's usual sitting-room: it was certainly for this reason that, near the chair in which she seated herself each time she re-entered, there hung a picture of a youthful face which bore a strong resemblance to her own: a beardless but masculine face, with rich brown hair hanging low on the forehead, and undulating beside each cheek down to the loose white cravat. Near this same chair were her writing-table, with vellum-covered account-books on it, the cabinet in which she kept her neatly-arranged drugs, her basket for her embroidery, a folio volume of architectural engravings from which she took her embroidery patterns, a number of the North Loamshire Herald, and the cushion for her fat Blenheim, which was too old and sleepy to notice its mistress's restlessness. For, just now, Mrs Transome could not abridge the sunny tedium of the day by the feeble interest of her usual indoor occupations. Her consciousness was absorbed by memories and prospects, and except when she walked to the entrance-door to look out, she sat motionless with folded arms, involuntarily from time to time turning towards the portrait close by her, and as often, when its young brown eyes met hers, turning away again with self-checking resolution.

At last, prompted by some sudden thought or by some sound, she rose and went hastily beyond the tapestry curtain into the library. She paused near the door without speaking: apparently she only wished to see that no harm was being done. A man nearer seventy than sixty was in the act of ranging on a large library-table a series of shallow drawers, some of them containing dried insects, others mineralogical specimens. His pale mild eyes, receding lower jaw, and slight frame, could never have expressed much vigour, either bodily or mental; but he had now the unevenness of gait and feebleness of gesture which tell of a past paralytic seizure. His threadbare clothes were thoroughly brushed; his soft white hair was carefully parted and arranged: he was not a neglected-looking old man; and at his side a fine black retriever, also old, sat on its haunches, and watched him as he went to and fro. But when Mrs Transome appeared within the doorway, her husband paused in his work and shrank like a timid animal looked at in a cage where flight is impossible. He was conscious of a troublesome intention, for which he had been rebuked before - that of disturbing all his specimens with a view to a new arrangement.

After an interval, in which his wife stood perfectly still, observing him, he began to put back the drawers in their places in the row of cabinets which extended under the bookshelves at one end of the library. When they were all put back and closed, Mrs Transome turned away, and the frightened old man seated himself with Nimrod the retriever on an ottoman. Peeping at him again, a few minutes after, she saw that he had his arm round Nimrod's neck, and was uttering his thoughts to

the dog in a loud whisper, as little children do to any object near them when they believe themselves unwatched.

At last the sound of the church-bell reached Mrs Transome's ear, and she knew that before long the sound of wheels must be within hearing; but she did not at once start up and walk to the entrance-door. She sat still, quivering and listening; her lips became pale, her hands were cold and trembling. Was her son really coming? She was far beyond fifty; and since her early gladness in this best-loved boy, the harvest of her life had been scanty. Could it be that now - when her hair was grey, when sight had become one of the day's fatigues, when her young accomplishments seemed almost ludicrous, like the tone of her first harpsichord and the words of the songs long browned with age - she was going to reap an assured joy? - to feel that the doubtful deeds of her life were justified by the result, since a kind Providence had sanctioned them? - to be no longer tacitly pitied by her neighbours for her lack of money, her imbecile husband, her graceless eldest-bom, and the loneliness of her life; but to have at her side a rich, clever, possibly a tender, son? Yes; but there were the fifteen years of separation, and all that had happened in that long time to throw her into the background in her son's memory and affection. And yet - did not men sometimes become more filial in their feeling when experience had mellowed them, and they had themselves become fathers? Still, if Mrs Transome had expected only her son, she would have trembled less; she expected a little grandson also: and there were reasons why she had not been enraptured when her son had written to her only when he was on the eve of returning that he already had an heir born to him.

But the facts must be accepted as they stood, and, after all, the chief thing was to have her son back again. Such pride, such affection, such hopes as she cherished in this fifty-sixth year of her life, must find their gratification in him - or nowhere. Once more she glanced at the portrait. The young brown eyes seemed to dwell on her pleasantly; but, turning from it with a sort of impatience, and saying aloud, 'Of course he will be altered!' she rose almost with difficulty, and walked more slowly than before across the hall to the entrance-door.

Already the sound of wheels was loud upon the gravel. The momentary surprise of seeing that it was only a post-chaise, without a servant or much luggage, that was passing under the stone archway and then wheeling round against the flight of stone steps, was at once merged in the sense that there was a dark face under a red travelling-cap looking at her from the window. She saw nothing else: she was not even conscious that the small group of her own servants had mustered, or that old Hickes the butler had come forward to open the chaise door. She heard herself called 'Mother ! ' and felt a light kiss on each cheek; but stronger than all that sensation was the

consciousness which no previous thought could prepare her for, that this son who had come back to her was a stranger. Three minutes before, she had fancied that, in spite of all changes wrought by fifteen years of separation, she should clasp her son again as she had done at their parting; but in the moment when their eyes met, the scnse of strangeness came upon her like a terror. It was not hard to understand that she was agitated, and the son led her across the hall to the sitting-room, closing the door behind them. Then he turned towards her and said, smiling - 'You would not have known me, eh, mother?'

It was perhaps the truth. If she had seen him in a crowd, she might have looked at him without recognition - not, however, without startled wonder; for though the likeness to herself was no longer striking, the years had overlaid it with another likeness which would have arrested her. Before she answered him, his eyes, with a keen restlessness, as unlike as possihle to the lingering gaze of the portrait, had travelled quickly over the room, alighting on her again as she said -

'Everything is changed, Harold. I am an old woman, you see.'

'But straighter and more upright than some of the young ones!' said Harold; inwardly, however, feeling that age had made his mother's face very anxious and eager. 'The old women at Smyrna are like sacks. You've not got clumsy and shapeless. How is it I have the trick of getting fat?' (Here Harold lifted his arm and spread out his plump hand.) 'I remember my father was as thin as a herring. How is my father? Where is he?'

Mrs Transome just pointed to the curtained doorway, and let her son pass through it alone. She was not given to tears; but now, under the pressure of emotion that could find no other vent, they burst forth. She took care that they should be silent tears, and before Harold came out of the library again they were dried. Mrs Transome had not the ferninine tendency to seek influence through pathos; she had been used to rule in virtue of acknowledged superiority. The consciousness that she had to make her son's acquaintance, and that her knowledge of the youth of nineteen might help her little in interpreting the man of thirty-four, had fallen like lead on her soul; but in this new acquaintance of theirs she cared especially that her son, who had seen a strange world, should feel that he was come home to a mother who was to be consulted on all things, and who could supply his lack of the local experience necessary to an English land-holder. Her part in life had been that of the clever sinner, and she was equipped with the views, the reasons, and the habits which belonged to that character: life would have little meaning for her if she were to be gently thrust aside as a harmless elderly woman. And besides, there

were secrets which her son must never know. So, by the time Harold came from the library again, the traces of tears were not discernible, except to a very careful observer. And he did not observe his mother carefully; his eyes only glanced at her on their way to the North Loamshire Herald, lying on the table near her, which he took up with his left hand, as he said -

'Gad ! what a wreck poor father is ! Paralysis, eh? Terribly shrunk and shaken - crawls about among his books and beetles as usual, though. Well, it's a slow and easy death. But he's not much over sixty-five, is he?'

'Sixty-seven, counting by birthdays; but your father was born old, I think,' said Mrs Transome, a little flushed with the determination not to show any unasked-for feeling.

Her son did not notice her. All the time he had been speaking his eyes had been running down the columns of the newspaper.

'But your little boy, Harold - where is he? How is it he has not come with you?'

'O, I left him behind, in town,' said Harold, still looking at the paper. 'My man Dominic will bring him, with the rest of the luggage. Ah, I see it is young Debarry, and not my old friend Sir Maximus, who is offering himself as candidate for North Loamshire.'

'Yes. You did not answer me when I wrote to you to London about your standing. There is no other Tory candidate spoken of, and you would have all the Debarry interest.'

'I hardly think that,' said Harold, significantly.

'Why? Jermyn says a Tory candidate can never be got in without it.'

'But I shall not be a Tory candidate.'

Mrs Transome felt something like an electric shock.

'What then?' she said, almost sharply. 'You will not call yourself a Whig?'

'God forbid ! I'm a Radical.'

Mrs Transome's limbs tottered; she sank into a chair. Here was a distinct confirmation of the vague but strong feeling that her son was a stranger to her. Here was a revelation to which it seemed almost as impossible to adjust her hopes and notions of a dignified life as if her

son had said that he had been converted to Mahometanism at Smyrna, and had four wives, instead of one son, shortly to arrive under the care of Dominic. For the moment she had a sickening feeling that it was all of no use that the long-delayed good fortune had come at last - all of no use though the unloved Durfey was dead and buried, and though Harold had come home with plenty of money. There were rich Radicals, she was aware, as there were rich Jews and Dissenters, but she had never thought of them as county people. Sir Francis Burdett had been generally regarded as a madman. It was better to ask no questions, but silently to prepare herself for anything else there might be to come.

'Will you go to your rooms, Harold, and see if there is anything you would like to have altered?'

'Yes, let us go,' said Harold, throwing down the newspaper, in which he had been rapidly reading almost every advertisement while his mother had been going through her sharp inward struggle. 'Uncle Lingon is on the bench still, I see,' he went on, as he followed her across the hall; 'is he at home - will he be here this evening?'

'He says you must go to the rectory when you want to see him. You must remember you have come back to a family who have old-fashioned notions. Your uncle thought I ought to have you to myself in the first hour or two. He remembered that I had not seen my son for fifteen years.'

'Ah, by Jove ! fifteen years - so it is I ' said Harold, taking his mother's hand and drawing it under his arm; for he had perceived that her words were charged with an intention. 'And you are as straight as an arrow still; you will carry the shawls I have brought you as well as ever.'

They walked up the broad stone steps together in silence. Under the shock of discovering her son's Radicalism, Mrs Transome had no impulse to say one thing rather than another; as in a man who had just been branded on the forehead all wonted motives would be uprooted. Harold, on his side, had no wish opposed to filial kindness, but his busy thoughts were imperiously determined by habits which had no reference to any woman's feeling; and even if he could have conceived what his mother's feeling was, his mind, after that momentary arrest, would have darted forward on its usual course.

'I have given you the south rooms, Harold,' said Mrs Transome, as they passed along a corridor lit from above, and lined with old family pictures 'I thought they would suit you best, as they all open into each other, and this middle one will make a pleasant sitting-room for you.'

'Gad ! the furniture is in a bad state,' said Harold, glancing round at the middle room which they had just entered; 'the moths seem to have got into the carpets and hangings.'

'I had no choice except moths or tenants who would pay rent,' said Mrs Transome. 'We have been too poor to keep servants for uninhabited rooms.'

'What ! you've been rather pinched, eh?'

'You find us living as we have been living these twelve years.'

'Ah, you've had Durfey's debts as well as the lawsuits - confound them ! It will make a hole in sixty thousand pounds to pay off the mortgages. However, he's gone now, poor fellow; and I suppose I should have spent more in buying an English estate some time or other. I always meant to be an Englishman, and thrash a lord or two who thrashed me at Eton.'

'I hardly thought you could have meant that, Harold, when I found you had married a foreign wife.'

'Would you have had me wait for a consumptive lackadaisical Englishwoman, who would have hung all her relations round my neck? I hate English wives; they want to give their opinion about everything. They interfere with a man's life. I shall not marry again.'

Mrs Transome bit her lip, and turned away to draw up a blind. She would not reply to words which showed how completely any conception of herself and her feelings was excluded from her son's inward world.

As she turned round again she said, 'I suppose you have been used to great luxury; these rooms look miserable to you, but you can soon make any alteration you like.'

'O, I must have a private sitting-room fitted up for myself down-stairs. And the rest are bedrooms, I suppose,' he went on, opening a side-door. 'Ah, I can sleep here a night or two. But there's a bedroom down-stairs, with an anteroom, I remember, that would do for my man Dominic and the little boy. I should like to have that.'

'Your father has slept there for years. He will be like a distracted insect, and never know where to go, if you alter the track he has to walk in.' 'That's a pity. I hate going up-stairs.'

'There is the steward's room: it is not used, and might be turned into a bedroom. I can't offer you my room, for I sleep up-stairs.' (Mrs

Transome's tongue could be a whip upon occasion, but the lash had not fallen on a sensitive spot.)

'No; I'm determined not to sleep up-stairs. We'll see about the steward's room to-morrow, and I daresay I shall find a closet of some sort for Dominic. It's a nuisance he had to stay behind, for I shall have nobody to cook for me. Ah, there's the old river I used to fish in. I often thought, when I was at Smyrna, that I would buy a park with a river through it as much like the Lapp as possible. Gad, what fine oaks those are opposite ! Some of them must come down, though.'

'I've held every tree sacred on the demesne, as I told you, Harold. I trusted to your getting the estate some time, and releasing it; and I determined to keep it worth releasing. A park without fine timber is no better than a beauty without teeth and hair.'

'Bravo, mother!' said Harold, putting his hand on her shoulder. 'Ah, you've had to worry yourself about things that don't properly belong to a woman - my father being weakly. We'll set all that right. You shall have nothing to do now but to be grandmamma on satin cushions.'

'You must excuse me from the satin cushions. That is a part of the old woman's duty I am not prepared for. I am used to be chief bailiff, and to sit in the saddle two or three hours every day. There are two farms on our hands besides the Home Farm.'

'Phew-ew ! Jermyn manages the estate badly, then. That will not last under my reign,' said Harold, turning on his heel and feeling in his pockets for the keys of his portmanteaus, which had been brought up.

'Perhaps when you've been in England a little longer,' said Mrs Transome, colouring as if she had been a girl, 'you will understand better the difficulties there is in letting farms in these times.'

'I understand the difficulty perfectly, mother. To let farms, a man must have the sense to see what will make them inviting to farmers, and to get sense supplied on demand is just the most difficult transaction I know of. I suppose if I ring there's some fellow who can act as valet and learn to attend to my hookah?'

'There is Hickes the butler, and there is Jabez the footman; those are all the men in the house. They were here when you left.'

'O, I remember Jabez - he was a dolt. I'll have old Hickes. He was a neat little machine of a butler; his words used to come like the clicks of an engine. He must be an old machine now, though.'

'You seem to remember some things about home wonderfully well, Harold.

'Never forget places and people - how they look and what can be done with them. All the country round here lies like a map in my brain. A deuced pretty country too; but the people were a stupid set of old Whigs and Tories. I suppose they are much as they were.'

'I am, at least, Harold. YOU are the first of your family that ever talked of being a Radical. I did not think I was taking care of our old oaks for that. I always thought Radicals' houses stood staring above poor sticks of young trees and iron hurdles.'

'Yes. but the Radical sticks are growing, mother, and half the Tory oaks are rotting,' said Harold, with gay carelessness. 'You've arranged for Jermyn to be early to-morrow?'

'He will be here to breakfast at nine. But I leave you to Hickes now; we dine in an hour.'

Mrs Transome went away and shut herself in her own dressing-room. It had come to pass now - this meeting with the son who had been the object of so much longing; whom she had longed for before he was born, for whom she had sinned, from whom she had wrenched herself with pain at their parting, and whose coming again had been the one great hope of her years. The moment was gone by; there had been no ecstasy, no gladness even; hardly half an hour had passed, and few words had been spoken, yet with that quickness in weaving new futures which belongs to women whose actions have kept them in habitual fear of consequences, Mrs Transome thought she saw with all the clearness of demonstration that her son's return had not been a good for her in the sense of making her any happier.

She stood before a tall mirror, going close to it and looking at her face with hard scrutiny, as if it were unrelated to herself. No elderly face can be handsome, looked at in that way; every little detail is startlingly prominent, and the effect of the whole is lost. She saw the dried-up complexion, and the deep lines of bitter discontent about the mouth.

'I am a hag!' she said to herself (she was accustomed to give her thoughts a very sharp outline), 'an ugly old woman who happens to be his mother. That is what he sees in me, as I see a stranger in him. I shall count for nothing. I was foolish to expect anything else.'

She turned away from the mirror and walked up and down her room.

'What a likeness!' she said, in a loud whisper; 'yet, perhaps, no one will see it besides me.'

She threw herself into a chair, and sat with a fixed look, seeing nothing that was actually present, but inwardly seeing with painful vividness what had been present with her a little more than thirty years ago - the little round-limbed creature that had been leaning against her knees, and stamping tiny feet, and looking up at her with gurgling laughter. She had thought that the possession of this child would give unity to her life, and make some gladness through the changing years that would grow up as fruit out of these early maternal caresses. But nothing had come just as she had wished. The mother's early raptures had lasted but a short time, and even while they lasted there had grown up in the midst of them a hungry desire, like a black poisonous plant feeding in the sunlight, - the desire that her first, rickety, ugly, imbecile child should die, and leave room for her darling, of whom she could be proud. Such desires make life a hideous lottery, where every day may turn up a blank; where men and women who have the softest beds and the most delicate eating, who have a very large share of that sky and earth which some are born to have no more of than the fraction to be got in a crowded entry, yet grow haggard, fevered, and restless, like those who watch in other lotteries. Day after day, year after year, had yielded blanks; new cares had come, bringing other desires for results quite beyond her grasp, which must also be watched for in the lottery; and all the while the round-limbed pet had been growing into a strong youth, who liked many things better than his mother's caresses, and who had a much keener consciousness of his independent existence than of his relation to her: the lizard's egg, that white rounded passive prettiness, had become a brown, darting, determined lizard. The mother's love is at first an absorbing delight, blunting all other sensibilities; it is an expansion of the animal existence; it enlarges the imagined range for self to move in: but in after years it can only continue to be joy on the same terms as other long-lived love - that is, by much suppression of self, and power of living in the experience of another. Mrs Transome had darkly felt the pressure of that unchangeable fact. Yet she had clung to the belief that somehow the possession of this son was the best thing she lived for; to believe otherwise would have made her memory too ghastly a companion. Some time or other, by some means, the estate she was struggling to save from the grasp of the law would be Harold's. Somehow the hated Durfey, the imbecile eldest, who seemed to have become tenacious of a despicable squandering life, would be got rid of; vice might kill him. Meanwhile the estate was burthened: there was no good prospect for any heir. Harold must go and make a career for himself: and this was what he was bent on, with a precocious clearness of perception as to the conditions on which he could hope for any advantages in life. Like most energetic natures, he had a strong faith in his luck; he had been gay at their parting, and

had promised to make his fortune; and in spite of past disappointments, Harold's possible fortune still made some ground for his mother to plant her hopes in. His luck had not failed him; yet nothing had turned out according to her expectations. Her life had been like a spoiled shabby pleasure-day, in which the music and the processions are all missed, and nothing is left at evening but the weariness of striving after what has been failed of. Harold had gone with the Embassy to Constantinople, under the patronage of a high relative, his mother's cousin; he was to be a diplomatist, and work his way upward in public life. But his luck had taken another shape: he had saved the life of an Armenian banker, who in gratitude had offered him a prospect which his practical mind had preferred to the problematic promises of diplomacy and high born cousinship. Harold had become a merchant and banker at Smyrna; had let the years pass without caring to find the possibility of visiting his early home, and had shown no eagerness to make his life at all familiar to his mother, asking for letters about England, but writing scantily about himself. Mrs Transome had kept up the habit of writing to her son, but gradually the unfruitful years had dulled her hopes and yearnings; increasing anxieties about money had worried her, and she was more sure of being fretted by bad news about her dissolute eldest son than of hearing anything to cheer her from Harold. She had begun to live merely in small immediate cares and occupations, and, like all eager-minded women who advance in life without any activity of tenderness or any large sympathy, she had contracted small rigid habits of thinking and acting, she had her 'ways' which must not be crossed, and had learned to fill up the great void of life with giving small orders to tenants, insisting on medicines for infirm cottagers, winning small triumphs in bargains and personal economies, and parrying ill-natured remarks of Lady Debarry's by lancet-edged epigrams. So her life had gone on till more than a year ago, when the desire which had been so hungry while she was a blooming young mother, was at last fulfilled - at last, when her hair was grey, and her face looked bitter, resdess, and unenjoying, like her life. The news came from Jersey that Durfey, the imbecile son, was dead. Now Harold was heir to the estate; now the wealth he had gained could release the land from its burthens; now he would think it worth while to return home. A change had at last come over her life, and the sunlight breaking the clouds at evening was pleasant, though the sun must sink before long. Hopes, affections, the sweeter part of her memories, started from their wintry sleep, and it once more seemed a great good to have had a second son who in some ways had cost her dearly. But again there were conditions she had not reckoned on. When the good tidings had been sent to Harold, and he had announced that he would return so soon as he could wind up his afEairs, he had for the first time informed his mother that he had been married, that his Greek wife was no longer living, but that he should bring home a litde boy, the finest and most desirable of heirs and grandsons. Harold, seated in

his distant Smyrna home, considered that he was taking a rational view of what tbings must have become by this time at the old place in England, when he figured his mother as a good elderly lady, who would necessarily be delighted with the possession on any terms of a healthy grandchild, and would not mind much about the particulars of the long-concealed marriage.

Mrs Transome had tom up that letter in a rage. But in the months which had elapsed before Harold could actually arrive, she had prepared herself as well as she could to suppress all reproaches or queries which her son might resent, and to acquiesce in his evident wishes. The return was still looked for with longing; affection and satisfied pride would again warm her later years. She was ignorant what sort of man Harold had become now, and of course he must be changed in many ways; but though she told herself this, still the image that she knew, the image fondness clung to, necessarily prevailed over the negatives insisted on by her reason.

And so it was, that when she had moved to the door to meet him, she had been sure that she should clasp her son again, and feel that he was the same who had been her boy, her little one, the loved child of her passionate youth. An hour seemed to have changed everything for her. A woman's hopes are woven of sunbeams; a shadow annihilates them. The shadow which had fallen over Mrs Transome in this first interview with her son was the presentiment of her powerlessness. If things went wrong, if Harold got unpleasantly disposed in a certain direction where her chief dread had always lain, she seemed to foresee that her words would be of no avail. The keenness of her anxiety in this matter had served as insight; and Harold's rapidity, decision, and indifference to any impressions in others which did not further or impede his own purposes, had made themselves felt by her as much as she would have felt the unmanageable strength of a great bird which had alighted near her, and allowed her to stroke its wing for a moment because food lay near her.

Under the cold weight of these thoughts Mrs Transome shivered. That physical reaction roused her from her reverie, and she could now hear the gende knocking at the door to which she had been deaf before. Notwithstanding her activity and the fewness of her servants, she had never dressed herself without aid; nor would that small, neat, exquisitely clean old woman who now presented herself have wished that her labour should be saved at the expense of such a sacrifice on her lady's part. The small old woman was Mrs Hickes, the butler's wife, who acted as housekeeper, lady's-maid, and superintendent of the kitchen - the large stony scene of inconsiderable cooking. Forty years ago she had entered Mrs Transome's service, when that lady was beautiful Miss Lingon, and her mistress still called her Denner, as she had done in the old days.

'The bell has rung, then, Denner, without my hearing it?' said Mrs Transome, rising.

'Yes, madame,' said Denner, reaching from a wardrobe an old black velvet dress trimmed with much mended point, in which Mrs Transome was wont to look queenly of an evening.

Denner had still strong eyes of that shortsighted kind which sees through the narrowest chink between the eye-lashes. The physical contrast between the tall, eagle-faced, dark-eyed lady, and the little peering waidng-woman, who had been round-featured and of pale mealy complexion from her youth up, had doubdess had a strong influence in determining Denner's feeling towards her mistress, which was of that worshipful sort paid to a goddess in ages when it was not thought necessary or likely that a goddess should be very moral. There were different orders of beings - so ran Denner's creed - and she belonged to another order than that to which her mistress belonged. She had a mind as sharp as a needle, and would have seen through and through the ridiculous pretensions of a born servant who did not submissively accept the rigid fate which had given her born superiors. She would have called such pretensions the wrigglings of a worm that tried to walk on its tail. There was a tacit understanding that Denner knew all her mistress's secrets, and her speech was plain and unflattering; yet with wonderful subtlety of instinct she never said anything which Mrs Transome could feel humiliated by, as by a familiarity from a servant who knew too much. Denner idendfied her own dignity with that of her mistress. She was a hard-headed godless little woman, but with a character to be reckoned on as you reckon on the qualities of iron.

Peering into Mrs Transome's face, she saw clearly that the meeting with the son had been a disappointment in some way. She spoke with a refined accent, in a low, quick, monotonous tone -

'Mr Harold is drest; he shook me by the hand in the corridor, and was very pleasant.' 'What an alteration, Denner! No likeness to me now.'

'Handsome, though, spite of his being so browned and stout. There's a fine presence about Mr Harold. I remember you used to say, madam, there were some people you would always know were in the room though they stood round a corner, and others you might never see till you ran against them. That's as true as truth. And as for likenesses, thirty-five and sixty are not much alike, only to people's memories.'

Mrs Transome knew perfectly that Denner had divined her thoughts.

'I don't know how things will go on now; but it seems something too good to happen that they will go on well. I am afraid of ever expecting anything good again.'

'That's weakness, madam. Things don't happen because they're bad or good, else all eggs would be addled or none at all, and at the most it is but six to the dozen. There's good chances and bad chances, and nobody's luck is pulled only by one string.'

'What a woman you are, Denner I You talk like a French infidel. It seems to me you are afraid of nothing. I have been full of fears all my life - always seeing something or other hanging over me that I couldn't bear to happen.'

'Well, madam, put a good face on it, and don't seem to be on the look-out for crows, else you'll set the other people watching. Here you have a rich son come home, and the debts will all be paid, and you have your health and can ride about, and you've such a face and figure, and will have if you live to be eighty, that everybody is cap in hand to you before they know who you are - let me fasten up your veil a little higher: there's a good deal of pleasure in life for you yet.'

'Nonsense I there's no pleasure for old women, unless they get it out of tormenting other people. What are your pleasures, Denner - besides being a slave to me?'

'Oh, there's pleasure in knowing one's not a fool, like half the people one sees about. And managing one's husband is some pleasure; and doing all one's business well Why, if I've only got some orange flowers to candy, I shouldn't like to die till I see them all right. Then there's the sunshine now and then; I like that, as the cats do. I look upon it, life is like our game at whist, when Banks and his wife come to the still-room of an evening. I don't enjoy the game much, but I like to play my cards well, and see what will be the end of it; and I want to see you make the best of your hand, madam, for your luck has been mine these forty years now. But I must go and see how Kitty dishes up the dinner, unless you have any more commands.' 'No, Denner; I am going down immediately.'

As Mrs Transome descended the stone staircase in her old black velvet and point, her appearance justified Denner's personal compliment. She had that high-born imperious air which would have marked her as an object of hatred and reviling by a revolutionary mob. Her person was too typical of social distinctions to be passed by with indifference by any one; it would have fitted an empress in her own right, who had had to rule in spite of faction, to dare the violation of treaties and dread retributive invasions, to grasp after new territories, to be defiant in desperate circumstances, and to feel a woman's hunger of the heart

for ever unsatisfied. Yet Mrs Transome's cares and occupations had not been at all of an imperial sort. For thirty years she had led the monotonous narrowing life which used to be the lot of our poorer gentry, who never went to town, and were probably not on speaking terms with two out of the five families whose parks lay within the distance of a drive. When she was young she had been thought wonderfully clever and accomplished, and had been rather ambitious of intellectual superiority - had secretly picked out for private reading the lighter parts of dangerous French authors - and in company had been able to talk of Mr Burke's style, or of Chateaubriand's eloquence - had laughed at the Lyrical Ballads and admired Mr Southey's 'Thalaba'. She always thought that the dangerous French writers were wicked, and that her reading of them was a sin; but many sinful things were highly agreeable to her, and many things which she did not doubt to be good and true were dull and meaningless. She found ridicule of Biblical characters very amusing, and she was interested in stories of illicit passion: but she believed all the while that truth and safety lay in due attendance on prayers and sermons, in the admirable doctrines and ritual of the Church of England, equally remote from Puritanism and Popery; in fact, in such a view of this world and the next as would preserve the existing arrangements of English society quite unshaken, keeping down the obtrusiveness of the vulgar and the discontent of the poor. The history of the Jews, she knew, ought to be preferred to any profane history; the Pagans, of course, were vicious, and their religions quite nonsensical, considered as religions - but classical learning came from the Pagans; the Greeks were famous for sculpture; the Italians for painting; the middle ages were dark and papistical; but now Christianity went hand in hand with civilization, and the providential government of the world, though a little confused and entangled in foreign countries, in our favoured land was clearly seen to be carried forward on Tory and Church of England principles, sustained by the succession of the House of Brunswick, and by sound English divines. For Miss Lingon had had a superior governess, who held that a woman should be able to write a good letter, and to express herself with propriety on general subjects. And it is astonishing how effective this education appeared in a handsome girl, who sat supremely well on horseback, sang and played a little, painted small figures in water-colours, had a naughty sparkle in her eyes when she made a daring quotation, and an air of serious dignity when she recited something from her store of correct opinions. But however such a stock of ideas may be made to tell in elegant society, and during a few seasons in town, no amount of bloom and beauty can make them a perennial source of interest in things not personal; and the notion that what is true and, in general, good for mankind, is stupid and drug-like, is not a safe theoretic basis in circumstances of temptation and difficulty. Mrs Transome had been in her bloom before this century began, and in the long painful years since then, what she had once regarded as her knowledge and

accomplishments had become as valueless as old-fashioned stucco ornaments, of which the substance was never worth anything, while the form is no longer to the taste of any living mortal. Crosses, mortifications, money-cares, conscious blameworthiness, had changed the aspect of the world for her: there was anxiety in the morning sunlight; there was unkind triumph or disapproving pity in the glances of greeting neighbours; there was advancing age, and a contracting prospect in the changing seasons as they came and went. And what could then sweeten the days to a hungry much-exacting self like Mrs Transome's? Under protracted ill every living creature will find something that makes a comparative ease, and even when life seems woven of pain, will convert the fainter pang into a desire. Mrs Transome, whose imperious will had availed little to ward off the great evils of her life, found the opiate for her discontent in the exertion of her will about smaller things. She was not cruel, and could not enjoy thoroughly what she called the old woman's pleasure of tormenting; but she liked every little sign of power her lot had left her. She liked that a tenant should stand bareheaded below her as she sat on horseback. She liked to insist that work done without her orders should be undone from beginning to end. She liked to be curtsied and bowed to by all the congregation as she walked up the little barn of a church. She liked to change a labourer's medicine fetched from the doctor, and substitute a prescription of her own. If she had only been more haggard and less majestic, those who had glimpses of her outward life might have said she was a tyrannical, griping harridan, with a tongue like a razor. No one said exactly that; but they never said anything like the full truth about her, or divined what was hidden under that outward life - a woman's keen sensibility and dread, which lay screened behind all her petty habits and narrow notions, as some quivering thing with eyes and throbbing heart may lie crouching behind withered rubbish. The sensibility and dread had palpitated all the faster in the prospect of her son's return; and now that she had seen him, she said to herself, in her bitter way, 'It is a lucky eel that escapes skinning. The best happiness I shall ever know, will be to escape the worst misery.'