A dream! After all, only a dream by the fire, but what a dream! And I am to be married to-morrow.

Can I be married to-morrow?

BARBARA WHO CAME BACK

CHAPTER I

THE RECTORY BLIND

This is the tale of Barbara, Barbara who came back to save a soul alive.

The Reverend Septimus Walrond was returning from a professional visit to a distant cottage of his remote and straggling parish upon the coast of East Anglia. His errand had been sad, to baptise the dying infant of a fisherman, which just as the rate was finished wailed once feebly and

expired in his arms. The Reverend Septimus was weeping over the sorrows of the world. Tears ran down his white but rounded face, for he was stout of habit, and fell upon his clerical coat that was green with age and threadbare with use. Although the evening was so cold he held his broad-brimmed hat in his hand, and the wind from the moaning sea tossed his snow-white hair. He was talking to himself, as was his fashion on these lonely walks.

"I think that fresh milk would have saved that child," he said, "but how was poor Thomas to buy fresh milk at fourpence a quart? Laid up for three months as he has been and with six children, how was he to buy fresh milk? I ought to have given it to him. I could have done without these new boots till spring, damp feet don't matter to an old man. But I thought of my own comfort--the son that doth so easily beset me--and so many to clothe and feed at home and poor Barbara, my darling Barbara, hanging between life and death."

He sobbed and wiped away his tears with the back of his hand, then began to pray, still aloud.

"O God of pity, in the name of the loving and merciful Christ, help me and poor Thomas in our troubles."

"I ought to have put Thomas's name first--my selfishness again," he ejaculated, then went on:

"Give consolation to Thomas who loved his baby, and if it pleases Thee in Thy infinite wisdom and foresight, spare my dearest Barbara's life, that she may live out her days upon the earth and perhaps in her turn give life to others. I know I should not ask it; I know it is better that she should go and be with Thee in the immortal home Thou hast prepared for us unhappy, suffering creatures. Yet--pity my poor human weakness--I do ask it. Or if Thou decreest otherwise, then take me also, O God, for I can bear no more. Four children gone! I can bear no more, O God."

He sobbed again and wiped away another tear, then muttered:

"My selfishness, always my selfishness! With six remaining to be looked after, that is counting Barbara if she still lives, I dare to ask to be relieved of the burdens of the flesh! Pitiful Christ, visit not my wickedness on me or on others, and O Thou that didst raise the daughter of Jairus, save my sweet Barbara and comfort the heart of poor Thomas. I will have faith. I will have faith."

He thrust his hat upon his head, pulling it down over his ears because of the rough wind, and walked forward quite jauntily for a few yards.

"What a comfort these new boots are," he said. "If I had stepped into that pool with the old ones my left foot would be wet through now. Let me thank God for these new boots. Oh! how can I, when I remember that the price of them should have been spent in milk for the poor baby? If

I were really a Christian I ought to take them off and walk barefoot, as the old pilgrims used to do. They say it is healthy, and I tried to think so because it is cheap, though I am sure that this was the beginning of poor little Cicely's last illness. With her broken chilblains she could not stand the snow; at any rate, the chill struck upwards. Well, she has been in bliss three years, three whole years, and how thankful I ought to be for that. How glad she will be to see Barbara too, if it pleases God in His mercy to take Barbara; she always was her favourite sister. I ought to remember that; I ought to remember that what I lose here I gain there, that my store is always growing in Heaven. But I can't, for I am a man still. Oh! curse it all! I can't, and like Job I wish I'd never been born. Job got a new family and was content, but that's their Eastern way. It's different with us Englishmen."

He stumbled on for a hundred yards or more, vacuously, almost drunkenly, for the hideous agony that he was enduring half paralysed his brain, and by its very excess was bringing him some temporary relief. He looked at the raging sea to his right, and in a vague fashion wished that it had swallowed him. He looked at the kind earth of the ploughed field to his left, and wished vividly, for the idea was more familiar, that six feet of it lay above him. Then he remembered that just beyond that sand-heap he had found a plover's nest with two eggs in it fifty years ago when he was a boy, and had taken one egg and left the other, or rather had restored it because the old bird screamed so pitifully about him. In some strange manner that little, long-forgotten act of righteousness

brought a glow of comfort to his tormented spirit. Perhaps God would deal so by him.

In its way the evening was very beautiful. The cold November day was dying into night. Clear, clear was the sky save for some black and heavy snow clouds that floated on it driven before the easterly wind that piped through the sere grasses and blew the plovers over him as though they were dead leaves. Where the sun had vanished long bars of purple lay above the horizon; to his excited fancy they looked like the gateway of another and a better world, set, as the old Egyptians dreamed, above the uttermost pylons of the West. What lay there beyond the sun? Oh! what lay beyond the sun? Perhaps, even now, Barbara knew!

A figure appeared standing upon a sand dune between the pathway and the sea. Septimus was short-sighted and could not tell who it was, but in this place at this hour doubtless it must be a parishioner, perhaps one waiting to see him upon some important matter. He must forget his private griefs. He must strive to steady his shaken mind and attend to his duties. He drew himself together and walked on briskly.

"I wish I had not been obliged to give away Jack," he said. "He was a great companion, and somehow I always met people with more confidence when he was with me; he seemed to take away my shyness. But the license was seven-and-sixpence, and I haven't got seven-and-sixpence; also he has an excellent home with that stuffy old woman, if a dull one, for he must miss his walk. Oh! it's you, Anthony. What are you doing here at

this time of night? Your father told me you had a bad cold and there's so much sickness about. You should be careful, Anthony, you know you're not too strong, none of you Arnotts are. Well, I suppose you are shooting, and most young men will risk a great deal in order to kill God's other creatures."

The person addressed, a tall, broad-shouldered, rather pale young man of about twenty-one, remarkable for his large brown eyes and a certain sweet expression which contrasted somewhat oddly with the general manliness of his appearance, lifted his cap and answered:

"No, Mr. Walrond, I am not shooting to-night. In fact, I was waiting here to meet you."

"What for, Anthony? Nothing wrong up at the Hall, I hope."

"No, Mr. Walrond; why should there be anything wrong there?"

"I don't know, I am sure, only as a rule people don't wait for the parson unless there is something amiss, and there seems to be so much misfortune in this parish just now. Well, what is it, my boy?"

"I want to know about Barbara, Mr. Walrond. They tell me she is very bad, but I can't get anything definite from the others, I mean from her sisters. They don't seem to be sure, and the doctor wouldn't say when I asked him."

The Reverend Septimus looked at Anthony and Anthony looked at the Reverend Septimus, and in that look they learned to understand each other. The agony that was eating out this poor father's heart was not peculiar to him; another shared it. In what he would have called his "wicked selfishness" the Reverend Septimus felt almost grateful for this sudden revelation. If it is a comfort to share our joys, it is a still greater comfort to share our torments.

"Walk on with me, Anthony," he said. "I must hurry, I have every reason to hurry. Had it not been a matter of duty I would not have left the house, but, so to speak, a clergyman has many children; he cannot prefer one before the other."

"Yes, yes," said Anthony, "but what about Barbara? Oh! please tell me at once."

"I can't tell you, Anthony, because I don't know. From here to the crest of Gunter's Hill," and he pointed to an eminence in front of them, "is a mile and a quarter. When we get to the crest of Gunter's Hill perhaps we shall know. I left home two hours ago, and then Barbara lay almost at the point of death; insensible."

"Insensible," muttered Anthony. "Oh! my God, insensible."

"Yes," went on the clergyman in a voice of patient resignation. "I don't

understand much about such things, but the inflammation appears to have culminated that way. Now either she will never wake again, or if she wakes she may live. At least that is what they tell me, but they may be wrong. I have so often known doctors to be wrong."

They walked on together in silence twenty yards or more. Then he added as though speaking to himself:

"When we reach the top of Gunter's Hill perhaps we shall learn. We can see her window from there, and if she had passed away I bade them pull the blind down; if she was about the same, to pull it half down, and if she were really better, to leave it quite up. I have done that for two nights now, so that I might have a little time to prepare myself. It is a good plan, though very trying to a father's heart. Yesterday I stood for quite a while with my eyes fixed upon the ground, not daring to look and learn the truth."

Anthony groaned, and once more the old man went on:

"She is a very unselfish girl, Barbara, or perhaps I should say was, perhaps I should say was. That is how she caught this horrible inflammation. Three weeks ago she and her sister Janey went for a long walk to the Ness, to--to--oh! I forget why they went. Well, it came on to pour with rain; and just as they had started for home, fortunately, or rather unfortunately, old Stevens the farmer overtook them on his way back from market and offered them a lift. They got into the cart

and Barbara took off the mackintosh that her aunt gave her last Christmas--it is the only one in the house, since such things are too costly for me to buy--and put it over Janey, who had a cold. It was quite unnecessary, for Janey was warmly wrapped up, while Barbara had nothing under the mackintosh except a summer dress. That is how she caught the chill."

Anthony made no comment, and again they walked forward without speaking, perhaps for a quarter of a mile. Then the horror of the suspense became intolerable to him. Without a word he dashed forward, sped down the slope and up that of the opposing Gunter's Hill, more swiftly perhaps than he had ever run before, although he was a very quick runner.

"He's gone," murmured Septimus. "I wonder why! I suppose that I walk too slowly for him. I cannot walk so fast as I used to do, and he felt the wind cold."

Then he dismissed the matter from his half-dazed mind and stumbled on wearily, muttering his disjointed prayers.

Thus in due course he began to climb the little slope of Gunter's Hill. The sun had set, but there was still a red glow in the sky, and against this glow he perceived the tall figure of Anthony standing quite still. When he was about a hundred yards away the figure suddenly collapsed, as a man does if he is shot. The Reverend Septimus put his hand to his heart and caught his breath.

"I know what that means," he said. "He was watching the window, and they have just pulled down the blind. I suppose he must be fond of her and it--affects him. Oh! if I were younger I think this would kill me, but, thank God! as one draws near the end of the road the feet harden; one does not feel the thorns so much. 'The Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away, bl--bl--yes, I will say it--blessed be the Name of the Lord.' I should remember that she is so much better where she is; that this is a very hard world; indeed, sometimes I think it is not a world, but a hell. Oh! Barbara, my sweet Barbara!" and he struggled forward blindly beating at the rough wind with his hands as though it were a visible foe, and so at last came to the crest of the hill where Anthony Arnott lay prone upon his face.

So sure was Septimus of the cause of his collapse that he did not even trouble to look at the Rectory windows in the hollow near the church two hundred yards or so away. He only looked at Anthony, saying:

"Poor lad, poor lad! I wonder how I shall get him home; I must fetch some help."

As he spoke, Anthony sat up and said, "You see, you see!"

"See what?"

"The blind; it is quite up. When I got here it was half down, then

someone pulled it up. That's what finished me. I felt as though I had been hit on the head with a stick."

The Reverend Septimus stared, then suddenly sank to his knees and returned thanks in his simple fashion.

"Don't let us be too certain, Anthony," he exclaimed at length. "There may be a mistake, or perhaps this is only a respite which will prolong the suspense. Often such things happen to torment us; I mean that they are God's way of trying and purifying our poor sinful hearts."

CHAPTER II

THE NEW YEAR FEAST

Barbara did not die. On the contrary, Barbara got quite well again, but her recovery was so slow that Anthony only saw her once before he was obliged to return to college. This was on New Year's Day, when Mr. Walrond asked him to dinner to meet Barbara, who was coming down for the first time. Needless to say he went, taking with him a large bunch of violets which he had grown in a frame at the Hall especially for Barbara. Indeed, she had already received many of those violets through the agency of her numerous younger sisters.

The Rectory dinner was at one o'clock, and the feast could not be called sumptuous. It consisted of a piece of beef, that known as the "aitch-bone," which is perhaps the cheapest that the butcher supplies when the amount of eating is taken into consideration; one roast duck, a large Pekin, the Near Year offering of the farmer Stevens; and a plum pudding somewhat pallid in appearance. These dainties with late apples and plenty of cold water made up the best dinner that the Walrond family had eaten for many a day.

The Rectory dining-room was a long, narrow chamber of dilapidated appearance, since between meals it served as a schoolroom also. A deal bookcase in the corner held some tattered educational works and the walls that once had been painted blue, but now were faded in patches to a sickly green, were adorned only with four texts illuminated by Barbara. These texts had evidently served as targets for moistened paper pellets, some of which still stuck upon their surface.

Anthony arrived a little late, since the picking of the violets had taken longer than he anticipated, and as there was no one to open the front door, walked straight into the dining-room. In the doorway he collided with the little maid-of-all-work, a red-elbowed girl of singularly plain appearance, who having deposited the beef upon the table, was rushing back for the duck, accompanied by two of the young Walronds who were assisting with the vegetables. The maid, recoiling, sat down with a bump on one of the wooden chairs, and the Walrond girls, a merry, good-looking, unkempt crew (no boy had put in an appearance

in all that family), burst into screams of laughter. Anthony apologised profusely; the maid, ejaculating that she didn't mind, not she, jumped up and ran for the duck; and the Reverend Septimus, a very different Septimus to him whom we met a month or so before, seizing his hand, shook it warmly, calling out:

"Julia, my dear, never mind that beef. I haven't said grace yet. Here's Anthony."

"Glad to see him, I am sure," said Mrs. Walrond, her eyes still fixed upon the beef, which was obviously burnt at one corner. Then with a shrug, for she was accustomed to such accidents, she rose to greet him.

Mrs. Walrond was a tall and extremely good-looking lady of about fifty-five, dark-eyed and bright complexioned, whose chestnut hair was scarcely touched with grey. Notwithstanding all the troubles and hardships that she had endured, her countenance was serene and even happy, for she was blessed with a good heart, a lively faith in Providence, and a well-regulated mind. Looking at her, it was easy to see whence Barbara and her other daughters inherited their beauty and air of breeding.

"How are you, Anthony?" she went on, one eye still fixed upon the burnt beef. "It is good of you to come, though you are late, which I suppose is why the girl has burnt the meat."

"Not a bit," called out one of the children, it was Janey, "it is very good of us to have him when there's only one duck. Anthony, you mustn't eat duck, as we don't often get one and you have hundreds."

"Not I, dear, I hate ducks," he relied automatically, for his eyes were seeking the face of Barbara.

Barbara was seated in the wooden armchair with a cushion on it, near the fire of driftwood, advantages that were accorded to her in honour of her still being an invalid. Even to a stranger she would have looked extraordinarily sweet with her large and rather plaintive violet eyes over which the long black lashes curved, her waving chestnut hair parted in the middle and growing somewhat low upon her forehead, her tall figure, very thin just now, and her lovely shell-like complexion heightened by a blush.

To Anthony she seemed a very angel, an angel returned from the shores of death for his adoration and delight. Oh! if things had gone the other way--if there had been no sweet Barbara seated in that wooden chair! The thought gripped his heart with a hand of ice; he felt as he had felt when he looked at the window-place from the crest of Gunter's Hill. But she had come back, and he was sure that they were each other's for life. And yet, and yet, life must end one day and then, what? Once more that hand of ice dragged at his heart strings.

In a moment it was all over and Mr. Walrond was speaking.

"Why don't you bid Barbara good-day, Anthony?" he asked. "Don't you think she looks well, considering? We do, better than you, in fact," he added, glancing at his face, which had suddenly grown pale, almost grey.

"He's going to give Barbara the violets and doesn't know how to do it," piped the irrepressible Janey. "Anthony, why don't you ever bring us violets, even when we have the whooping cough?"

"Because the smell of them is bad for delicate throats," he answered, and without a word handed the sweet-scented flowers to Barbara.

She took them, also without a word, but not without a look, pinned a few to her dress, and reaching a cracked vase from the mantelpiece, disposed of the rest of them there till she could remove them to her own room. Then Mr. Walrond began to say grace and the difficulties of that meeting were over.

Anthony sat by Barbara. His chair was rickety, one of the legs being much in need of repair; the driftwood fire that burned brightly about two feet away grilled his spine, for no screen was available, and he nearly choked himself with a piece of very hot and hard potato. Yet to tell the truth never before did he share in such a delightful meal. For soon, when the clamour of "the girls" swelled loud and long, and the attention of Mr. and Mrs. Walrond was entirely occupied with the burnt beef and the large duck that absolutely refused to part with its limbs,

he found himself almost as much alone with Barbara as though they had been together on the wide seashore.

"You are really getting quite well?" he asked.

"Yes, I think so." Then, after a pause and with a glance from the violet eyes, "Are you glad?"

"You know I am glad. You know that if you had--died, I should have died too."

"Nonsense," said the curved lips, but they trembled and the violet eyes were a-swim with tears. Then a little catch of the throat, and, almost in a whisper, "Anthony, father told me about you and the window-blind and--oh! I don't know how to thank you. But I want to say something, if you won't laugh. Just at that time I seemed to come up out of some blackness and began to dream of you. I dreamed that I was sinking back into the blackness, but you caught me by the hand and lifted me quite out of it. Then we floated away together for ever and for ever and for ever, for though sometimes I lost you we always met again. Then I woke up and knew that I wasn't going to die, that's all."

"What a beautiful dream," began Anthony, but at that moment, pausing from her labours at the beef, Mrs. Walrond said:

"Barbara, eat your duck before it grows cold. You know the doctor said

you must take plenty of nourishment."

"I am going to, mother," answered Barbara, "I feel dreadfully hungry," and really she did; her gentle heart having fed full, of a sudden her body seemed to need no nourishment.

"Dear me!" said Mr. Walrond, pausing from his labours and viewing the remains of the duck disconsolately, for he did not see what portion of its gaunt skeleton was going to furnish him with dinner, and duck was one of his weaknesses, "dear me, there's a dreadful smell of burning in this room. Do you think it can be the beef, my love?"

"Of course it is not the beef," replied Mrs. Walrond rather sharply. "The beef is beautifully done."

"Oh!" ejaculated one of the girls who had got the calcined bit, "why, mother, you said it was burnt yourself."

"Never mind what I said," replied Mrs. Walrond severely, "especially as I was mistaken. It is very rude of your father to make remarks about the meat."

"Well, something is burning, my love."

Janey, who was sitting next to Anthony, paused from her meal to sniff, then exclaimed in a voice of delight:

"Oh! it is Anthony's coat tails. Just look, they are turning quite brown. Why, Anthony, you must be as beautifully done as the beef. If you can sit there and say nothing, you are a Christian martyr wasted, that's all."

Anthony sprang up, murmuring that he thought there was something wrong behind, which on examination there proved to be. The end of it was that the chairs were all pushed downwards, with the result that for the rest of that meal there was a fiery gulf fixed between him and Barbara which made further confidences impossible. So he had to talk of other matters. Of these, as it chanced, he had something to say.

A letter had arrived that morning from his elder brother George, who was an officer in a line regiment. It had been written in the trenches before Sebastopol, for these events took place in the mid-Victorian period towards the end of the Crimean War. Or rather the letter had been begun in the trenches and finished in the military hospital, whither George had been conveyed, suffering from "fever and severe chill," which seemed to be somewhat contradictory terms, though doubtless they were in fact compatible enough. Still he wrote a very interesting letter, which, after the pudding had been consumed to the last spoonful, Anthony read aloud while the girls ate apples and cracked nuts with their teeth.

"Dear me! George seems to be very unwell," said Mrs. Walrond.

"Yes," answered Anthony, "I am afraid he is. One of the medical officers whom my father knows, who is working in that hospital, says they mean to send him home as soon as he can bear the journey, though he doesn't think it will be just at present."

This sounded depressing, but Mr. Walrond found that it had a bright side.

"At any rate, he won't be shot like so many poor fellows; also he has been in several of the big battles and will be promoted. I look upon him as a made man. He'll soon shake off his cold in his native air----"

"And we shall have a real wounded hero in the village," said one of the girls.

"He isn't a wounded hero," answered Janey, "he's only got a chill."

"Well, that's as bad as wounded, dear, and I am sure he would have been wounded if he could." And so on.

"When are you going back to Cambridge, Anthony?" asked Mrs. Walrond presently.

"To-morrow morning, I am sorry to say," he answered, and Barbara's face fell at his words. "You see, I go up for my degree this summer term, and my father is very anxious that I should take high honours in

mathematics. He says that it will give me a better standing in the Bar. So I must begin work at once with a tutor before term, for there's no one near here who can help me."

"No," said Mr. Walrond. "If it had been classics now, with a little refurbishing perhaps I might. But mathematics are beyond me."

"Barbara should teach him," suggested one of the little girls slyly. "She's splendid at Rule of Three."

"Which is more than you are," said Mrs. Walrond in severe tones, "who always make thirteen out of five and seven. Barbara, love, you are looking very tired. All this noise is too much for you, you must go and lie down at once in your own room. No, not on the sofa, in your own room. Now say good-bye to Anthony and go."

So Barbara, who was really tired, though with a happy weariness, did as she was bid. Her hand met Anthony's and lingered there for a little, her violet eyes met his brown eyes and lingered there a little; her lips spoke some few words of commonplace farewell. Then staying a moment to take the violets from the cracked vase, and another moment to kiss her father as she passed him, she walked, or rather glided from the room with the graceful movement that was peculiar to her, and lo! at once for Anthony it became a very emptiness. Moreover, he grew aware of the hardness of his wooden seat and that the noise of the girls was making his head ache. So presently he too rose and departed.

CHAPTER III

AUNT MARIA

Six months or so had gone by and summer reigned royally at Eastwich, for thus was the parish named of which the Reverend Septimus Walrond had spiritual charge. The heath was a blaze of gold, the cut hay smelt sweetly in the fields, the sea sparkled like one vast sapphire, the larks beneath the sun and the nightingales beneath the moon sang their hearts out on Gunter's Hill, and all the land was full of life and sound and perfume.

On one particularly beautiful evening, after partaking of a meal called "high tea," Barbara, quite strong again now and blooming like the wild rose upon her breast, set out alone upon a walk. Her errand was to the cottage of that very fisherman whose child her father had baptised on the night when her life trembled in the balance. Having accomplished this she turned homewards, lost in reverie, events having happened at the Rectory which gave her cause for thought. When she had gone a little way some instinct led her to look up. About fifty yards away a man was walking towards her to all appearance also lost in reverie. Even at that distance and in the uncertain evening light she knew well enough that this was Anthony. Her heart leapt at the sight of him and her cheeks

seemed to catch the hue of the wild rose on her bosom. Then she straightened her dress a little and walked on.

In less than a minute they had met.

"I heard where you had gone and came to meet you," he said awkwardly. "How well you are looking, Barbara, how well and----" he had meant to add "beautiful," but his tongue stumbled at the word and what he said was "brown."

"If I were an Indian I suppose I should thank you for the compliment, Anthony, but as it is I don't know. But how well you are looking, how well and by comparison--fat."

Then they both laughed, and he explained at length how he had been able to get home two days earlier than he expected; also that he had taken his degree with even higher honours than he hoped.

"I am so glad," she said earnestly.

"And so am I; I mean glad that you are glad. You see, if it hadn't been for you I should never have done so well. But because I thought you would be glad, I worked like anything."

"You should have thought of what your father would feel, not of--of--well, it has all ended as it should, so we needn't argue. How

is your brother George?" she went on, cutting short the answer that was rising to his lips. "I suppose I should call him Captain Arnott now, for I hear he has been promoted. We haven't seen him since he came home last week, from some hospital in the South of England, they say."

Anthony's face grew serious.

"I don't know; I don't quite like the look of him, and he coughs such a lot. It seems as though he could not shake off that chill he got in the trenches. That's why he hasn't been to call at the Rectory."

"I hope this beautiful weather will cure him," Barbara replied rather doubtfully, for she had heard a bad report of George Arnott's health. Then to change the subject she added, "Do you know, we had a visitor yesterday, Aunt Maria in the flesh, in a great deal of flesh, as Janey says."

"Do you mean Lady Thompson?"

She nodded.

"Aunt Thompson and her footman and her pug dog. Thank goodness, she only stayed to tea, as she had a ten mile drive back to her hotel. As it was, lots of things happened."

"What happened?"

"Well, first when she got out of the carriage, covered with jet anchor chains--for you know Uncle Samuel died only three months ago and left her all his money--she caught sight of our heads staring at her out of the drawing-room window, and asked father if he kept a girls' school. Then she made mother cry by remarking that she ought to be thankful to Providence for having taken to its bosom the four of us who died young --you know she has no children herself and so can't feel about them. Also father was furious because she told him that at least half of us should have been boys. He turned quite pink and said:

"'I have been taught, Lady Thompson, that these are matters which God Almighty keeps in His own hands, and to Him I must refer you.'

"'Good gracious! don't get angry,' she answered. 'If you clergymen can cross-examine your Maker, I am not in that position. Besides, they are all very good-looking girls who may find husbands, if they ever see a man. So things might have been worse.'

"Then she made remarks about the tea, for Uncle Samuel was a tea-merchant; and lastly that wicked Janey sent the footman to take the pug dog to walk past the butcher's shop where the fighting terrier lives. You can guess the rest."

"Was the pug killed?" asked Anthony.

"No, though the poor thing came back in a bad way. I never knew before that a pug's tail was so long when it is quite uncurled. But the footman looked almost worse, for he got notice on the spot. You see he went into the 'Red Dragon' and left the pug outside."

"And here endeth Aunt Maria and all her works," said Anthony, who wanted to talk of other things.

"No, not quite."

He looked at her, for there was meaning in her voice.

"In fact," she went on, "so far as I'm concerned it ought to run, 'Here beginneth Aunt Maria.' You see, I have got to go and live with her to-morrow."

Anthony stopped and looked at her.

"What the devil do you mean?" he asked.

"What I say. She took a fancy to me and she wants a companion--someone to do her errands and read to her at night and look after the pug dog and so forth. And she will pay me thirty pounds a year with my board and dresses. And" (with gathering emphasis) "we cannot afford to offend her who have half lived upon her alms and old clothes for so many years. And, in short, Dad and my mother thought it best that I should go, since

Joyce can take my place, and at any rate it will be a mouth less to feed at home. So I am going to-morrow morning by the carrier's cart."

"Going?" gasped Anthony. "Where to?"

"To London first, then to Paris, then to Italy to winter at Rome, and then goodness knows where. You see, my Aunt Maria has wanted to travel all her life, but Uncle Samuel, who was born in Putney, feared the sea and lived and died in Putney in the very house in which he was born. Now Aunt Maria wants a change and means to have it."

Then Anthony broke out.

"Damn the old woman! Why can't she take her change in Italy or wherever she wishes, and leave you alone?"

"Anthony!" said Barbara in a scandalised voice. "What do you mean, Anthony, by using such dreadful language about my aunt?"

"What do I mean? Well" (this with the recklessness of despair), "if you want to know, I mean that I can't bear your going away."

"If my parents," began Barbara steadily----

"What have your parents to do with it? I'm not your parents, I'm your----"

Barbara looked at him in remonstrance.

"--old friend, played together in childhood, you know the kind of thing. In short, I don't want you to go to Italy with Lady Thompson. I want you to stop here."

"Why, Anthony? I thought you told me you were going to live in chambers in London and read for the Bar."

"Well, London isn't Italy, and one doesn't eat dinners at Lincoln's Inn all the year round, one comes home sometimes. And heaven knows whom you'll meet in those places or what tricks that horrible old aunt of yours will be playing with you. Oh! it's wicked! How can you desert your poor father and mother in this way, to say nothing of your sisters? I never thought you were so hard-hearted."

"Anthony," said Barbara in a gentle voice, "do you know what we have got to live on? In good years it comes to about 150 pounds, but once, when my father got into that lawsuit over the dog that was supposed to kill the sheep, it went down to 70 pounds. That was the winter when two of the little ones died for want of proper food--nothing else--and I remember that the rest of us had to walk barefoot in the mud and snow because there was no money to buy us boots, and only some of us could go out at once because we had no cloaks to put on. Well, all this may happen again. And so, Anthony, do you think that I should be right to

throw away thirty pounds a year and to make a quarrel with my aunt, who is rich and kind-hearted although very over-bearing, and the only friend we have? If my father died, Anthony, or even was taken ill, and he is not very strong, what would become of us? Unless Aunt Thompson chose to help we should all have to go to the workhouse, for girls who have not been specially trained can earn nothing, except perhaps as domestic servants, if they are strong enough. I don't want to go away and read to Aunt Maria and take the pug dog out walking, although it is true I should like to see Italy, but I must--can't you understand--I must. So please reproach me no more, for it is hard to bear--especially from you."

"Stop! For God's sake, stop!" said Anthony. "I am a brute to have spoken like that, and I'm helpless; that's the worst of it. Oh! my darling, don't you understand? Don't you understand----?"

"No," answered Barbara, shaking her head and beginning to cry.

"That I love you, that I have always loved you, and that I always shall love you until--until--the moon ceases to shine?" and he pointed to that orb which had appeared above the sea.

"They say that it is dead already, and no doubt will come to an end like everything else," remarked Barbara, seeking to gain time.

Then for a while she sought nothing more, who found herself lost in her

lover's arms.

So there they plighted their troth, that was, they swore, more enduring than the moon, for indeed they so believed.

"Nothing shall part us except death," he said.

"Why should death part us?" she answered, looking him bravely in the eyes. "I mean to live beyond death, and while I live and wherever I live death shall not part us, if you'll be true to me."

"I'll not fail in that," he answered.

And so their souls melted into rapture and were lifted up beyond the world. The song of the nightingales was heavenly music in their ears, and the moon's silver rays upon the sea were the road by which their linked souls travelled to the throne of Him who had lit their lamp of love, and there made petition that through all life's accidents and death's darkness it might burn eternally.

For the love of these two was deep and faithful, and already seemed to them as though it were a thing they had lost awhile and found once

more; a very precious jewel that from the beginning had shone upon their breasts; a guiding-star to light them to that end which is the dawn of Endlessness.

Who will not smile at such thoughts as these?

The way of the man with the maid and the way of the maid with the man and the moon to light them and the birds to sing the epithalamium of their hearts and the great sea to murmur of eternity in their opened ears. Nature at her sweet work beneath the gentle night--who is there that will not say that it was nothing more?

Well, let their story answer.

CHAPTER IV

A YEAR LATER

Something over a year had gone by, and Barbara, returned from her foreign travels, sat in the drawing-room of Lady Thompson's house in Russell Square.

That year had made much difference in her, for the sweet country girl, now of full age, had blossomed into the beautiful young woman of the world. She had wintered in Rome and studied its antiquities and art. She had learned some French and Italian, for nothing was grudged to her in the way of masters, and worked at music, for which she had a natural taste. She had seen a good deal of society also, for Lady Thompson was at heart proud of her beautiful niece, and spared no expense to bring her into contact with such people as she considered she should know.

Thus it came about that the fine apartment they occupied in Rome had many visitors. Among these was a certain Secretary of Legation, the Hon. Charles Erskine Russell, who, it was expected, would in the course of nature succeed to a peerage. He was a very agreeable as well as an accomplished and wealthy man, and--he fell in love with Barbara. With the cleverness of her sex she managed to put him off and to avoid any actual proposal before they left for Switzerland in the early summer. Thither, happily, he could not follow them, since his official duties prevented him from leaving the Embassy. Lady Thompson was much annoyed at what she considered his bad conduct, and said as much to Barbara.

Her niece listened, but did not discuss the matter, with the result that Lady Thompson's opinion of the Hon. Charles Russell was confirmed. Was it not clear that there had been no proposal, although it was equally clear that he ought to have proposed? Poor Barbara! Perhaps this was the only act of deception of which she was ever guilty.

So things went on until the previous day, the Monday after their arrival in London, when, most unhappily, Lady Thompson went out to lunch and met the Hon. Charles Russell, who was on leave in England.

Next morning, while Barbara was engaged in arranging some flowers in the drawing-room, who should be shown in but Mr. Russell. In her alarm she dropped a bowl and broke it, a sign that he evidently considered hopeful, setting it down to the emotion which his sudden presence caused. To emotion it was due, indeed, but not of a kind he would have wished. Recovering herself, Barbara shook his hand and then told the servant who was picking up the pieces of the bowl to inform her ladyship of the arrival of this morning caller.

The man bowed and departed, and as he went Barbara noticed an ominous twinkle in the pleasant blue eyes of the Hon. Charles Russell.

The rest of the interview may be summed up in a few words. Mr. Russell was eloquent, passionate and convincing. He assured Barbara that she was the only woman he had ever loved with such force and conviction that in the end she almost believed him. But this belief, if it existed, did not in the least shake her absolutely definite determination to have nothing whatsoever to do with her would-be lover.

Not until she had told him so six times, however, did he consent to believe her, for indeed he had been led to expect a very different answer.

"I suppose you care for someone else," he said at last.

"Yes," said Barbara, whose back, metaphorically, was against the wall.

"Somebody much more--suitable."

"No," said Barbara, "he is poor and not distinguished and has all his way to make in the world."

"He might change his mind, or--die."

"If so, I should not change mine," said Barbara. "Very likely I shall not marry him, but I shall not marry anyone else."

"In heaven's name, why not?"

"Because it would be a sacrilege against heaven."

Then at last Mr. Russell understood.

"Allow me to offer you my good wishes and to assure you of my earnest and unalterable respect," he said in a somewhat broken voice, and taking her hand he touched it lightly with his lips, turned, and departed out of Barbara's sight and life.

Ten minutes later Lady Thompson arrived, and her coming was like to that of a thunderstorm. She shut the door, locked it, and sat down in an armchair in solemn, lurid silence. Then with one swift flash the storm broke.

"What is this I hear from Mr. Russell?"

"I am sure I don't know what you have heard from Mr. Russell," answered Barbara faintly.

"Perhaps, but you know very well what there was to hear, you wicked, ungrateful girl."

"Wicked!" murmured Barbara, "ungrateful!"

"Yes, it is wicked to lead a man on and then reject him as though he were--rubbish. And it is ungrateful to throw away the chances that a kind aunt and Providence put in your way. What have you against him?"

"Nothing at all, I think him very nice."

Lady Thompson's brow lightened; if she thought him "very nice" all might yet be well. Perhaps this refusal was nothing but nonsensical modesty. Mr. Russell, being a gentleman, had not told her everything.

"Then I say you shall marry him."

"And I say, Aunt, that I will not and cannot."

"Why? Have you been secretly converted to the Church of Rome, and are you going into a nunnery? Or is there--another man?"

"Yes, Aunt."

"Where is he?" said Lady Thompson, looking about her as though she expected to find him hidden under the furniture. "And how did you manage to become entangled with him, you sly girl, under my very nose? And who is he? One of those bowing and scraping Italians, I suppose, who think you'll get my money. Tell me the truth at once."

"He is somebody you have never seen, Aunt. One of the Arnotts down at home."

"Oh, that Captain! Well, I believe they have a decent property, about 2,000 pounds a year, but all in land, which Sir Samuel never held by. Of course, it is nothing like the Russell match, which would have made a peeress of you some day and given you a great position meanwhile. But I suppose we must be thankful for small mercies."

"It is not Captain Arnott, it is his younger brother Anthony."

"Anthony! Anthony, that youth who is reading for the Bar. Why, the property is all entailed, and he will scarcely have a half-penny, for his mother brought no money to the Arnotts. Oh, this is too much! To throw up Mr. Russell for an Anthony. Are you engaged to him with your parents' consent, may I ask, and if so, why was the matter concealed from me, who would certainly have declined to drag an entangled young woman about the world?"

"I am not engaged, but my father and mother know that we are attached to each other. It happened the day after you came to Eastwich, or they would have told you. My father made me promise that we would not correspond while I was away, as he thought that we were too young to bind ourselves to each other, especially as Anthony has no present prospects or means to support a wife."

"I am glad they had so much sense. It is more than might have been expected of my sister after her own performance, for which doubtless she is sorry enough now. Like you, she might have married a title instead of a curate and beggary."

"I am quite sure that my mother is not sorry, Aunt," replied Barbara, whose spirit was rising. "I know that she is a very happy woman."

"Look here, Barbara, let's come to the point. Will you give up this moon-calf business of yours or not?"

"It is not a moon-calf business, whatever that may be, and I will not give it up."

"Very well, then, I can't make you as you are of age. But I have done with you. You will go to your room and stop there, and to-morrow morning you will return to your parents, to whom I will write at once. You have betrayed my hospitality and presumed upon my kindness; after all the things I have given you, too," and her eyes fixed themselves upon a pearl necklace that Barbara was wearing. For Lady Thompson could be generous when she was in the mood.

Barbara unfastened the necklace and offered it to her aunt without a word.

"Nonsense!" said Lady Thompson. "Do you think I want to rob you of your trinkets because I happen to have given them to you? Keep them, they may be useful one day when you have a husband and a family and no money. Pearls may pay the butcher and the rent."

"Thank you for all your kindness, Aunt, and good-bye. I am sorry that I am not able to do as you wish about marriage, but after all a woman's life is her own."

"That's just what it isn't and never has been. A woman's life is her husband's and her children's, and that's why--but it is no use arguing.

You have taken your own line. Perhaps you are right, God knows. At any rate, it isn't mine, so we had better part. Still, I rather admire your courage. I wonder what this young fellow is like for whose sake you are prepared to lose so much; more than you think, maybe, for I had grown fond of you. Well, good-bye, I'll see about your getting off. There, don't think that I bear malice although I am so angry with you. Write to me when you get into a tight place," and rising, she kissed her, rather roughly but not without affection, and flung out of the room like one who feared to trust herself there any longer.

On the evening of the following day Barbara, emerging from the carrier's cart at the blacksmith's corner at Eastwich, was met by a riotous throng of five energetic young sisters who nearly devoured her with kisses. So happy was that greeting, indeed, that in it she almost forgot her sorrows. In truth, as she reflected, why should she be sorry at all? She was clear of a suitor whom she did not wish to marry, and of an aunt whose very kindness was oppressive and whose temper was terrible. She had fifty pounds in her pocket and a good stock of clothes, to say nothing of the pearls and other jewellery, wealth indeed if measured by the Walrond standard. Her beloved sisters were evidently in the best of health and spirits; also, as she thought, better-looking than any girls she had seen since she bade them farewell. Her father and mother were, as they told her, well and delighted at her return; and lastly, as she had already gathered, Anthony either was or was about to be at the Hall.

Why then should she be sorry? Why indeed should she not rejoice and thank God for these good things?

On that evening, however, when supper was done, she had a somewhat serious interview with her father and mother who sat on either side of her, each of them holding one of her hands, for they could scarcely bear her out of their sight. She had told all the tale of the Hon. Charles Russell and of her violent dismissal by her aunt, of which story they were not entirely ignorant, for Lady Thompson had already advised them of these events by letter.

The Reverend Septimus shook his head sadly. He was not a worldly-minded man; still, to have a presumptive peer for a son-in-law, who would doubtless also become an ambassador, was a prospect that at heart he relinquished with regret. Also this young Arnott business seemed very vague and unsatisfactory, and there were the other girls and their future to be considered. No wonder, then, that he shook his kindly grey head and looked somewhat depressed.

But his wife took another line.

"Septimus," she said, "in these matters a woman must judge by her own heart, and you see Barbara is a woman now. Once, you remember, I had to face something of the same sort, and I do not think, dear, notwithstanding all our troubles, that either of us have regretted our decision."

Then they both rose and solemnly kissed each other over Barbara's head.

CHAPTER V

WEDDED

Next day, oh! joy of joys, Barbara and Anthony met once more after some fifteen months of separation. Anthony was now in his twenty-fourth year, a fine young man with well-cut features, brown eyes and a pleasant smile. Muscularly, too, he was very strong, as was shown by his athletic record at Cambridge. Whether his strength extended to his constitution was another matter. Mrs. Walrond, noticing his unvarying colour, which she thought unduly high, and the transparent character of his skin, spoke to her husband upon the matter.

In his turn Septimus spoke to the old local doctor, who shrugged his shoulders and remarked that the Arnotts had been delicate for generations, "lungy," he called it. Noticing that Mr. Walrond looked serious, and knowing something of how matters stood between Anthony and Barbara, he hastened to add that so far as he knew there was no cause for alarm, and that if he were moderately careful he thought that Anthony would live to eighty.

"But it is otherwise with his brother," he added significantly, "and for the matter of that with the old man also."

Then he went away, and there was something in the manner of his going which seemed to suggest that he did not wish to continue the conversation.

From Anthony, however, Barbara soon learned the truth as to his brother. His lungs were gone, for the chill he took in the Crimea had settled on them, and now there was left to him but a little time to live. This was sad news and marred the happiness of their meeting, since both of them were far too unworldly to consider its effect upon their own prospects, or that it would make easy that which had hitherto seemed impossible.

"Are you nursing him?" she asked.

"Yes, more or less. I took him to the South of England for two months, but it did no good."

"I am glad the thing is not catching," she remarked, glancing at him.

"Oh, no," he replied carelessly, "I never heard that it was catching, though some people say it runs in families. I hope not, I am sure, as the poor old chap insists upon my sleeping in his room whenever I am at home, as we used to do when we were boys."

Then their talk wandered elsewhere, for they had so much to say to each other that it seemed doubtful if they would ever get to the end of it all. Anthony was particularly anxious to learn what blessed circumstance had caused Barbara's sudden re-appearance at Eastwich. She fenced for a while, then told him all the truth.

"So you gave up this brilliant marriage for me, a fellow with scarcely a half-penny and a very few prospects," he exclaimed, staring at her.

"Of course. What would you have expected me to do--marry one man while I love another? As for the rest it must take its chance," and while the words were on her lips, for the first time it came into Barbara's mind that perhaps Anthony had no need to trouble about his worldly fortunes. For if it were indeed true that Captain Arnott was doomed, who else would succeed to the estate?

"I think you are an angel," he said, still overcome by this wondrous instance of fidelity and of courage in the face of Lady Thompson's anger.

"If I had done anything else, I think, Anthony, that you might very well have called me--whatever is the reverse of an angel."

And thus the links of their perfect love were drawn even closer than before.

Only three days later Mr. Walrond was summoned hastily to the Hall. When he returned from his ministrations it was to announce in a sad voice that Captain Arnott was sinking fast. Before the following morning he was dead.

A month or so after the grave had closed over Captain Arnott the engagement of Anthony and Barbara was announced formally, and by the express wish of Mr. Arnott. The old gentleman had for years been partially paralysed and in a delicate state of health, which the sad loss of his elder son had done much to render worse. He sent for Barbara, whom he had known from her childhood, and told her that the sooner she and Anthony were married the better he would be pleased.

"You see, my dear," he added, "I do not wish the old name to die out after we have been in this place for three hundred years, and you Walronds are a healthy stock, which is more than we can say now. Worn out, I suppose, worn out! In fact," he went on, looking at her sharply, "it is for you to consider whether you care to take the risks of coming into this family, for whatever the doctors may or may not say, I think it my duty to tell you straight out that in my opinion there is some risk."

"If so, I do not fear it, Mr. Arnott, and I hope you will not put any such idea into Anthony's head. If you do he might refuse to marry me,

and that would break my heart."

"No, I dare say you do not fear it, but there are other--well, things must take their course. If we were always thinking of the future no one would dare to stir."

Then he told her that when first he heard of their mutual attachment he had been much disturbed, as he did not see how they were to marry.

"But poor George's death has changed all that," he said, "since now Anthony will get the estate, which is practically the only property we have, and it ought always to produce enough to keep you going and to maintain the place in a modest way."

Lastly he presented her with a valuable set of diamonds that had belonged to his mother, saying he might not be alive to do so when the time of her marriage came, and dismissed her with his blessing.

In due course all these tidings, including that of the diamonds, came to the ears of Aunt Thompson, and wondrously softened that lady's anger. Indeed, she wrote to Barbara in very affectionate terms, to wish her every happiness and say how glad she was to hear that she was settling herself so well in life. She added that she should make a point of being present at the wedding. A postscript informed her that Mr. Russell was about to be married to an Italian countess, a widow.

Barbara's wedding was fixed for October. At the beginning of that month, however, Anthony was seized with some unaccountable kind of illness, in which coughing played a considerable part. So severe were its effects that it was thought desirable to postpone the ceremony. The doctor ordered him away for a change of air. On the morning of his departure he spoke seriously to Barbara.

"I don't know what is the matter with me," he said, "and I don't think it is very much at present. But, dear, I have a kind of presentiment that I am going to become an invalid. My strength is nothing like what it was, and at times it fails me in a most unaccountable manner. Barbara, it breaks my heart to say it, but I doubt whether you ought to marry me."

"If you were going to be a permanent invalid, which I do not believe for one moment," answered Barbara steadily, "you would want a nurse, and who could nurse you so well as your wife? Therefore unless you had ceased to care for me, I should certainly marry you."

Then, as still he seemed to hesitate, she flung her arms about him and kissed him, which was an argument that he lacked strength to resist.

A day or two afterwards her father also spoke to Barbara.

"I don't like this illness of Anthony's, my dear. The doctor does not seem to understand it, or at any rate so he pretends, and says he has

no doubt it will pass off. But I cannot help remembering the case of his brother George; also that of his mother before him.. In short, Barbara, do you think--well, that it would be wise to marry him? I know that to break it off would be dreadful, but, you see, health is so very important."

Barbara turned on her father almost fiercely.

"Whose health?" she asked. "If you mean mine, it is in no danger; and if it were I should care nothing. What good would health be to me if I lost Anthony, who is more to me than life? But if you mean his health, then the greatest happiness I can have is to nurse him."

"Yes, yes, I understand, dear. But, you see, there might be--others."

"If so, father, they must run their risks as we do; that is if there are any risks for them to run, which I doubt."

"I dare say you are quite right, dear; indeed, I feel almost sure that you are right, only I thought it my duty to mention the matter, which I hope you will forgive me for having done. And now I may tell you I have a letter from Anthony, saying that he is ever so much better, and asking if the fifteenth of November will suit us for the wedding."

On the fifteenth of November, accordingly, Anthony and Barbara were made man and wife by the bride's father with the assistance of the clergyman of the next parish. Owing to the recent death of the bridegroom's brother and the condition of Mr. Arnott's health the wedding was extremely quiet. Still, in its own way it was as charming as it was happy. All her five sisters acted as Barbara's bridesmaids, and many gathered in that church said they were the most beautiful bevy of maidens that ever had been seen. But if so, Barbara outshone them all, perhaps because of her jewels and fine clothes and the radiance on her lovely face.

Anthony, who seemed to be quite well again, also looked extremely handsome, while Aunt Thompson, who by now had put off her mourning, shone in that dim church as the sun shines through a morning mist.

In short, all went as merrily as it should, save that the bride's mother seemed depressed and wept a little.

This, said her sister to someone in a loud voice, was in her opinion nothing short of wicked. What business, she asked, has a woman with six portionless daughters to cry because one of them is making a good marriage; "though it is true," she added, dropping her voice to a confidential whisper, "that had Barbara chosen she might have made a better one. Yes, I don't mind telling you that she might have been a peeress, instead of the wife of a mere country squire."

In truth, Mrs. Walrond was ill at ease about this marriage, why she did not know. Something in her heart seemed to tell her that her dear daughter's happiness would not be of long continuance. Bearing in mind his family history, she feared for Anthony's health; indeed, she feared a hundred things that she was quite unable to define. However, at the little breakfast which followed she seemed quite to recover her spirits and laughed as merrily as anyone at the speech which Lady Thompson insisted upon making, in which she described Barbara as "her darling, beautiful and most accomplished niece, who indeed was almost her daughter."

CHAPTER VI

PARTED

Hard indeed would it be to find a happier marriage than that of Anthony and Barbara. They adored each other. Never a shadow came between them. Almost might it be said that their thoughts were one thought and their hearts one heart. It is common to hear of twin souls, but how often are they to be met with in the actual experience of life? Here, however, they really might be found, or so it would seem. Had they been one ancient entity divided long ago by the working of Fate and now brought together once more through the power of an overmastering attraction, their union could not have been more complete. To the eye of the

observer, and indeed to their own eyes, it showed neither seam nor flaw. They were one and indivisible.

About such happiness as this there is something alarming, something ominous. Mrs. Walrond felt it from the first, and they, the two persons concerned, felt it also.

"Our joy frightens me," said Anthony to Barbara one day. "I feel like that Persian monarch who threw his most treasured ring into the sea because he was too fortunate; you remember the sea refused the offering, for the royal cook found it in the mouth of a fish."

"Then, dear, he was doubly fortunate, for he made his sacrifice and kept his ring."

Anthony, seeing that Barbara had never heard the story and its ending, did not tell it to her, but she read something of what was passing in his mind, as very often she had the power to do.

"Dearest," she said earnestly, "I know what you think. You think that such happiness as ours will not be allowed to last for long, that something evil will overtake us. Well, it may be so, but if it is, at least we shall have had the happiness, which having been, will remain for ever, a part of you, a part of me; a temple of our love not built with hands in which we shall offer thanks eternally, here and--beyond," and she nodded towards the glory of the sunset sky, then turned and

kissed him.

As it chanced, that cruel devouring sea which rages at the feet of all mankind was destined ere long to take the offering that was most precious to these two. Only this was flung to its waters, not by their hands, but by that of Fate, nor did it return to them again.

After their marriage Anthony and Barbara hired a charming little Georgian house at Chelsea near to the river. The drawback to the dwelling was that it stood quite close to a place of public entertainment called "The Gardens," very well known in those days as the nightly haunt of persons who were not always as respectable as they might have been. During their sojourn in London they never entered these Gardens, but often in the summer evenings they passed them when out for the walks which they took together, since Anthony spent most of his days at the Temple, studying law in the chambers of a leading barrister. Thus their somewhat fantastic gateway became impressed upon Barbara's mind, as did the character of the people who frequented them. As, however, their proximity reduced the rent of their own and neighbouring houses by about one-half, personally they were grateful to these Gardens, since the noise of the bands and the dancing did not trouble them much, and those who danced could always be avoided.

When they had been married nearly a year a little daughter was born to

them, a sweet baby with violet eyes like to those of Barbara. Now indeed their bliss was complete, but it was not fated that it should remain, since the hungry sea took its sacrifice. The summer was very hot in London, and many infants sickened there of some infantile complaint, among them their own child. Like hundreds of others, it died when only a few months old and left them desolate.

Perhaps Anthony was the more crushed of the two, since here Barbara's vivid faith came to her aid.

"We have only lost her for a little while," she said, choking back her tears as she laid some flowers on the little grave. "We shall find her again; I know that we shall find her again, and meanwhile she will be happier than she could have been with us in this sad world."

Then they walked back home, pushing their way through the painted crowds that were gathering at the gates of "The Gardens," and listening to the strains of the gay music that jarred upon their ears.

In due course, having been called to the Bar, Anthony entered the chambers of an eminent Common Law leader. Although his prospects were now good, and he was ere long likely to be independent of the profession, he was anxious to follow it and make a name and fortune for himself. This indeed he would have found little difficulty in doing,

since soon he showed that he had studied to good purpose; moreover, his gifts were decidedly forensic. He spoke well and without nervousness; his memory was accurate and his mind logical. Moreover, he had something of that imaginative and sympathetic power which brings an advocate success with juries.

Already he had been entrusted with a few cases which he held as "devil" for somebody else, when two events happened which between them brought his career as a lawyer to an end. In the November after the death of their baby his father suddenly died. On receiving the news of his fatal illness Anthony hurried to Eastwich without even returning home to fetch a warm coat, and as a result took a severe cold. During the winter following the funeral this cold settled on his lungs. At last towards the spring the crisis came. He was taken seriously ill, and on his partial recovery several doctors held a consultation over him. Their verdict was that he must give up his profession, which fortunately now he was in a position to do, live in the country and as much in the open air as possible, spending the worst months of the winter either in the South of England or in some warmer land. These grave and learned men told him outright that his lungs were seriously attacked, and that he must choose between following their advice and a speedy departure from the world.

Anthony would have defied them, for that was his nature. He wished to go on with his work and take the risk. But Barbara persuaded him to obedience. She said she agreed with him that the matter of his health

was greatly exaggerated. At the same time, she pointed out that as they were now very well off she saw no reason why he should continue to slave at a profession which might or might not bring him an adequate return fifteen or twenty years later. She added that personally she detested London, and would like nothing better than to live at Eastwich near her own people. Also she showed him that his rather extensive estate needed personal attention, and could be much improved in value if he were there to care for it.

The end may be guessed; Anthony gave up the Bar and the house in Chelsea. After staying at Torquay for a few of the winter months, where his health improved enormously, they moved to Eastwich during the following May. Here their welcome was warm indeed, not only from the Rectory party, who rejoiced to have Barbara back among them, but from the entire neighbourhood, including the tenants and labourers on the property.

The ensuing summer was one of the happiest of their married life. Anthony became so much better that Barbara began to believe he had thrown off his lung weakness. Certain repairs and rearrangements of their old Elizabethan house agreeably occupied their time, and, to crown all, on Christmas Eve Barbara gave birth to a son, an extraordinarily fine and vigorous child, red-haired, blue-eyed, and so far as could be seen at that early age entirely unlike either of his parents.

The old doctor who ushered him into the world remarked that he had never

seen a more splendid and perfect boy, nor one who appeared to possess a robuster constitution.

In due course Mr. Walrond christened him by the name of Anthony, after his father, and a dinner was given to the tenants and labourers in honour of the event.

That same month, there being a dearth of suitable men with an adequate knowledge of the law, Anthony, who already was a magistrate, though so young, was elected a Deputy-Chairman of Quarter Sessions for his county. This local honour pleased him very much, since now he knew that his legal education would not be wasted, and that he would have an opportunity of turning it to use as a judge of minor cases.

Yet this grateful and conciliatory appointment in the end brought him evil and not good. The first Quarter Sessions at which he was called upon to preside in one of the courts fell in February, when he ought to have been out of the East of England. The calendar was heavy, and Anthony acquitted himself very well in the trial of some difficult cases, earning the compliments of all concerned. But on leaving the hot court after a long day he caught a heavy cold, which awoke his latent complaint, and from that time forward he began to go down hill.

Still, watched, fought against by Barbara, its progress was slow. The winter months they spent in warmer climates, only residing in Eastwich from May to November. During the summer Anthony occupied himself on

matters connected with the estate and principally with the cultivation of the home farm. Indeed, as time went on and increasing weakness forced him to withdraw himself more and more from the world and its affairs, the interests of this farm loomed ever larger in his eyes, as largely indeed as though he depended upon it alone for his daily bread. Moreover, it brought him into touch with Nature, and now that they were so near to parting, his friendship with her grew very close.

This was one of his troubles, that when he died, and he knew that before very long he must die, even if he continued to live in some other form, he must bid farewell to the Nature that he knew.

Of course, there was much of her, her cruel side, that he would rejoice to lose. He could scarcely conceive a future existence framed upon those lines of struggle, which in its working involves pain and cruelty and death. Putting aside sport and its pleasures, which he had abandoned because of the suffering and extinction entailed upon the shot or hunted creatures, to him it seemed inexpressibly sad that even his honest farming operations, at least where the beasts were concerned, should always culminate in death. Why should the faithful horse be knocked on the head when it grew old, or the poor cow go to the butcher as a reward for its long career of usefulness and profit?

What relentless power had thus decreed? In any higher life surely this decree would be rescinded, and of that side of Nature he had seen more than enough upon the earth. It was her gentler and harmless aspects from

which he did not wish to part--from the flower and the fruit, from the springing blade and the ripened corn; from the beauty that brooded over sea and land; from the glory of the spreading firmament alive with light, and the winds that blew beneath it, and the rains that washed the face of earth; from the majestic passage of the glittering stars shedding their sweet influences through the night. To bid farewell to such things as these must, to his mind, indeed be terrible.

Once he said as much to Barbara, who thought a while and answered him:

"Why should we be taken beyond all things? If seems scarcely reasonable. I know we have not much to go on, but did not the Christ speak of drinking the fruit of the vine 'new with you in my Father's kingdom'? Therefore surely there must be a growing plant that produces the fruit and a process directed by intelligence that turns it into wine. There must be husbandmen or farmers. There must be mansions or abiding places, also, for they are spoken of, and flowers and all things that are beautiful and useful; a new earth indeed, but not one so different to the old as to be utterly unfamiliar."

Anthony said no more of the matter at this time, but it must have remained in his mind. At any rate, a month or two later when he woke up one morning he said to Barbara:

"Will you laugh very much if I tell you of a dream that came to me last night--if it was a dream, for I seemed to be still awake?"

"Why should I laugh at your dream?" she asked, kissing him. "I often think that there is as much truth in dreams as in anything else. Tell it to me."

"I dreamed that I saw a mighty landscape which I knew was not of the earth. It came to me like a picture, and a great stillness brooded over it. At the back of this landscape stood a towering cliff of stern rock thousands of feet high. Set at intervals along the edge of the cliff were golden figures, mighty and immovable. Whether they were living guards or only statues I do not know, for I never came near to them. Here and there, miles apart, streams from the lands beyond poured over the edge of the cliff in huge cascades of foam that became raging torrents when they reached its lowest slopes. One of these rivers fed a lake which lay in a chasm on the slopes, and from either end of this lake poured two rivers which seemed to me about twenty miles apart, as we should judge. They ran through groves of cedars and large groups of forest trees not unlike to enormous oaks and pines, and yet not the same.

"One river, that to the right if I looked towards the lake, was very broad, so broad that after it reached the plain and flowed slowly, great ships could have sailed upon it. The other, that to the left, was smaller and more rapid, but it also wandered away across the plain till my sight could follow it no farther. I observed that the broad, right-hand river evidently inundated its banks in seasons of flood, much

as the Nile does, and that all along those banks were fields filled with rich crops, of what sort I do not know. The plain itself, which I take it was a kind of delta, the gift of the great river, was limitless. It stretched on and on, broken only by forests, along the edges of which moved many animals.

"When first I saw this landscape it was suffused with a sweet and pearly light, that came not from sun or moon or stars, but from a luminous body in shape like a folded fan, of which the handle rested on the earth. By degrees this fan began to open; I suppose that it was the hour of dawn. Its ribs of gorgeous light spread themselves from one side of heaven to the other and were joined together by webs of a thousand colours, of such stuff as the rainbow, only a hundred times more beautiful. The reflection from these rainbow webs lay upon the earth, divided by and sometimes mingled with those from the bars of light, and made it glorious.

"All these things I saw from an eminence on which I stood that rose between the rivers at the head of the plain. At length, overcome by the splendour, drunk as it were with beauty, I turned to look behind me, and there, quite close, in the midst of stately gardens with terraces and trees and fountains and banks of flowers, I saw a house, and--now indeed you will laugh--for so far as I can recollect it, in general style it was not unlike our own; that is to say, its architecture seemed to be more or less Elizabethan. If one who was acquainted with Elizabethan buildings had gone to that land and built a house from memory, but

with more beautiful materials, he might have produced such a one as I imagined in my dream.

"Presently from the door of the house emerged two figures. One of these was my brother George and the other, Barbara, was our baby grown to a little fair-haired child. The child perceived me first and ran to me through the flowers. It leapt into my arms and kissed me. Then my brother came and said--I do not mean he spoke, but his meaning was conveyed to me:

"'You see, we are making your home ready. We hope that you will like it when you come, but if not you can change it as you wish.'

"Then I woke up, or went to sleep--I do not know which."

Barbara made light of Anthony's dream, which seemed to her to be after all but a reflection or an echo of earthly things tricked out with some bizarre imagination. Was not this obvious? The house? A vague replica of his own house. The river? Something copied from the Nile, delta and all. The waterfalls? Niagara on a larger scale. The great trees? Doubtless their counterparts grew in America. The brother and the babe--would he not naturally be thinking of his brother and his babe? The thing stood self-convicted. Echo, echo, echo, flung back in mockery of our agonised pleadings from the cliffs of the Beyond.

And yet this dream haunted her, especially as it returned to him more than once, always with a few added details. They often talked of this supernatural landscape and of the great radiant fan which closed at night and opened itself by day, wherewith it was illuminated. Barbara thought it strange that Anthony should have imagined so splendid a thing. And yet why should he not have done so? If she could picture it in her own mind, why should he not be able to originate it in his.

She told him all this, only avoiding allusions to the child, the baby Barbara whom they had lost. For of this child, although she longed to ask him details as to her supposed appearance, she could not bring herself to speak. Supposing that he were right, supposing that their daughter was really growing up yonder towards some celestial womanhood, and waiting for him and waiting for her, the mother upon whose breast she had lain, the poor, bereaved mother. Oh! then would not all be worth while?

Anthony listened and said that he agreed with her; as a lawyer he had analysed the dream and found in it nothing at all. Nothing more, for instance, than on analysis is to be found in any and every religion.

"And yet," he added, with that pleasant smile of his which was beginning to grow so painfully sweet and plaintive in its character, "and yet, it is very odd how real that landscape and that house are becoming to me. Do you know, Barbara, that the other night I seemed to be sitting in

it in a great cool room, looking out at the river and the vast fertile plain. Then you came in, my dear, clad in a beautiful robe embroidered with violets. Yes, you came in glancing round you timidly like one who had lost her way, and saw me and cried aloud."

Towards the end Anthony grew worse with a dreadful swiftness. He was to have gone abroad as usual that winter, but when the time came his state was such that the doctors shrugged their shoulders and said that he might as well stop at home in comfort.

Up to the middle of October he managed to get out upon the farm on fine days to see to the drilling of the wheat and so forth. One rather rough afternoon he went out thus, not because he wished to, but for the sake of his spaniel dog, Nell, which bothered him to come into the fresh air. Not finding something that he sought, he was drawn far afield and caught in a tempest of rain and wind, through which he must struggle home. Barbara who, growing anxious, had gone to seek him, found him leaning against an oak unable to speak, with a little stream of blood trickling from the corner of his mouth. Indeed, it was the dog, which seemed distressed, that discovered her and led her to him.

This was Anthony's last outing, but he lived till Christmas Eve, his son's eighth birthday. That morning the boy was brought into his room to receive some present that his father had procured for him, and

warned that he must be very quiet. Quiet, however, he would not be; his tumultuous health and strength seemed to forbid it. He racketed about the room, teasing the spaniel which lay by the side of the bed, until the patient beast growled at him and even bit, or pretended to bite him. Thereon he set up such a yell of pain, or anger, or both, that his father struggled from the bed to see what was the matter, and so brought on the haemorrhage which caused his death.

"I am afraid you will have trouble with that child, Barbara," he gasped shortly before the end. "He seems to be different from either of us; but he is our son, and I know that you will do your best for him. I leave him in your keeping. Good night, dearest, I want to go to sleep."

Then he went to sleep, and Barbara's heart broke.

CHAPTER VII

BARBARA'S SIN

The months following Anthony's death were to Barbara as a bad dream. Like one in a dream she saw that open, wintry grave beneath the tall church tower about whose battlements the wind-blown rooks wheeled on their homeward way. She noted a little yellow aconite that had opened its bloom prematurely in the shadow of the wall, and the sight of it brought her some kind of comfort. He had loved aconites and planted many of them, though because of his winter absences years had gone by since he had seen one with his eyes, at any rate in England. That this flower among them all should bloom on that day and in that place seemed to her a message and a consolation, the only one that she could find.

His sad office over, her father accompanied her home, pouring into her ear the words of faith and hope that he was accustomed to use to those broken by bereavement, and with him came her mother. But soon she thanked them gently and bade them leave her to herself. Then they brought her son to her, thinking that the sight of him would thaw her heart. For a while the child was quiet and subdued, for there was that about his mother's face which awed him. At last, weary of being still, he swung round on his heel after a fashion that he had, and said:

"Cook says that now father is dead I'm master here, and everyone will have to do what I tell them."

Barbara lifted her head and looked at him, and something in her fawn-like eyes, a mute reproach, pierced to the boy's heart. At any rate, he began to whimper and left the room.

There was little in the remark, which was such as a vulgar servant might well make thoughtlessly. Yet it brought home to Barbara the grim fact of her loss more completely perhaps than anything had done. Her beloved husband was dead, of no more account in the world than those who had passed from it at Eastwich a thousand years ago. He was dead, and soon would be forgotten by all save her, and she was alone; in her heart utterly alone.

The summer came and everyone grew cheerful. Aunt Thompson arrived at the Hall to stay, and urged Barbara to put away past things and resign herself to the will of Providence--as she had done in the case of the departed Samuel.

"After all," she said, "it might have been worse. You might have been called upon to nurse an invalid for twenty years, and when at last he went, have found the best part of your life gone, as I did," and she sighed heavily. "As it is, you still look quite a girl, having kept your figure so well; you are comfortably off and have a good position, and in short there is no knowing what may happen in the future. You must come

up and stay with me this winter, dear, instead of poking yourself away in this damp old house, where everybody seems to die of consumption. Really it is a sort of family vault, and if you stop here long enough you will catch something too."

Barbara thanked her with a sad little smile, and answered that she would think over her kind invitation and write to her later. But in the end she never went to London, at least not to stay, perhaps it reminded her too vividly of her life there with Anthony. At Eastwich she could bear such memories, but for some unexplained reason it was otherwise in London.

Indeed, in the course of time her aunt gave up the attempt to persuade her, and devoted herself to forwarding the fortunes of her other pretty nieces, Barbara's sisters, two of whom, it should be said, already she had settled comfortably in life. Also she took a fancy to the boy, in whose rough, energetic nature she found something akin to her own.

"I am sick of women," she said; "it is a comfort to have to do with a male thing."

So it came about that after he went to school young Anthony spent a large share of his holidays at his great-aunt's London house. It may be added that he got no good from these visits, since Lady Thompson spoilt him and let him have his way in everything. Also she gave him more money than a boy ought to have. As a result, or partly so, Barbara found that

her son grew more and more uncontrollable. He mixed with grooms and low characters, and when checked flew into fits of passion which frightened her.

Oddly enough, during these paroxysms, which were generally followed by two or three days of persistent sulking, the only person who seemed to have any control over him was a certain under-housemaid named Bess Cotton, the daughter of a small farmer in the neighbourhood. This girl, who was only about three years older than Anthony, was remarkable for her handsome appearance and vigour of body and mind. Her hair and large eyes were so dark that probably the local belief that she had gipsy or other foreign blood in her veins was true. Her complexion, however, was purely English, and her character had all the coarseness of those who have lived for generations in the Fens, whence her father came, uncontrolled by higher influences, such as the fellowship of gentle-bred and educated folk.

Bess was an excellent and capable servant, one, moreover, who soon obtained a sort of mastery in the household. On a certain occasion the young Squire, as they called him, was in one of the worst of his rages, having been forbidden by his mother to go to a coursing meeting which he wished to attend. In this state he shut himself up in the library, swearing that he would do a mischief to anyone who came near him, a promise which, being very strong for his years, he was quite capable of keeping. The man-servant was told to go in and bring him out, but hung back.

"Bless you," said Bess, "I ain't afraid," and without hesitation walked into the room and shut the door behind her.

Barbara, listening afar off, heard a shout of "Get out!" followed by a fearful crash, and trembled, for all violence was abominable to her nature.

"He will injure that poor girl," she said to herself, and rose, proposing to enter the library and face her son.

As she hurried down the long Elizabethan corridor, however, she heard another sound that came to her through an open window, that of Anthony laughing in his jolliest and most uproarious manner and of the housemaid Bess, laughing with him. She stayed where she was and listened. Bess had left the library and was coming across the courtyard, where one of the other servants met her and asked some question that Barbara did not catch. The answer in Bess's ringing voice was clear enough.

"Lord!" she said, "they always gave me the wild colts to break upon the farm. It is a matter of eye and handling, that's all. He nearly got me with that plaster thing, so I went for him and boxed his ears till he was dazed. Then I kissed him afterwards till he laughed, and he'll never be any more trouble, at least with me. That mother of his don't know how to handle him. She's another breed."

"Yes," said the questioner, "the mistress is a lady, she is, and gentle like the squire who's gone. But how did they get such a one as Master Anthony?"

"Don't know," replied Bess, "but father says that when he was a boy in the Fens they'd have told that the fairy folk changed him at birth. Anyway, I like him well enough, for he suits me."

Barbara went back to her sitting-room, where not long afterwards the boy came to her. As he entered the doorway she noted how handsome he looked with his massive head and square-jawed face, and how utterly unlike any Arnott or Walrond known to her personally or by tradition. Had he been a changeling, such as the girl Bess spoke of, he could not have seemed more different.

He came and stood before her, his hands in his pockets and a smile upon his face, for he could smile very pleasantly when he chose.

"Well, Anthony," she said, "what is it?"

"Nothing, mother dear, except that I have come to beg your pardon. You were quite right about the coursing meeting; they are a low lot, and I oughtn't to mix with them. But I had bets on some of the dogs and wanted to go awfully. Then when you said I mustn't I lost my temper."

"That was very evident, Anthony."

"Yes, mother; I felt as though I could have killed someone. I did try to kill Bess with that bust of Plato, but she dodged like a cat and the thing smashed against the wall. Then she came for me straight and gave me what I deserved, for she was too many for me. And presently all my rage went, and I found that I was laughing while she tidied my clothes. I wish you could do the same, mother."

"Do you, Anthony? Well, I cannot."

"I know. Where did I get my temper from, mother? Not from you, or my father from all I have heard and remember of him."

"Your grandfather would say it was from the devil, Anthony."

"Yes, and perhaps he is right; only then it is rather hard luck on me, isn't it? I can't help it--it comes."

"Then make it go, Anthony. You are to be confirmed soon. Change your heart."

"I'll try. But, mother dear, though I am so bad to you, you are the only one who will ever change me. When that wild-cat of a girl got the better of me just now, it was you I thought of, not her. If I lost you I don't know what would become of me."

"We have to stand or fall alone, Anthony."

"Perhaps, mother. I don't know; I am not old enough. Still, don't leave me alone, for if you do, then I am sure which I shall do," and bending down he kissed her and left the room.

After this scene Anthony's behaviour improved very much; his reports from school were good, for he was quick and clever, and his great skill in athletics made him a favourite. Also his grandfather, who prepared him for confirmation, announced that the lad's nature seemed to have softened.

So things remained for some time, to be accurate, for just so long as the girl Bess was a servant at the Hall.

Anthony might talk about his mother's influence over him, and without doubt when he was in his normal state this was considerable. Also it served to prevent him from breaking out. But when he did break out, Bess Catton alone could deal with him. Naturally it would be thought that there was some mutual attraction between these young people. Yet this was not so, at any rate on the part of the girl, who had been overheard to tell Anthony to his face that she hated the sight of him and "would cut him to ribbons" if she were his mother.

At any rate, there were others, or one other, of whom Bess did not hate the sight, and in the end her behaviour caused such scandal that Barbara

was obliged to send her out of the house.

"All right, ma'am," she said, "I'll go, and be glad of a change. You may ring your own bull-calf now and I wish you joy of the job, since there's none but me that can lead him."

A few days later Anthony returned from school. With him came a letter from the head master, who wrote that he did not wish to make any scandal, and therefore had not expelled the boy. Still, he would be obliged if his mother would refrain from sending him back, as he did not consider him a suitable member of a public school. He suggested, in the lad's own interest, that it might be wise to place him in some establishment where a speciality was made of the training of unruly youths. He added that he wrote this with the more regret since Anthony's father and grandfather had been scholars at ---- in their day, and her son possessed no mean intellectual abilities. This would be shown by the fact that he was at the head of his class, and might doubtless under other circumstances have risen to a high place in the sixth form.

Then followed the details of his misdoings, of which one need only be mentioned. He had fought another boy, who, it may be added, was older than himself, and beaten him. But the matter did not end there, since after his adversary had given up the fight Anthony flew at him and maltreated him so ferociously before they could be separated, that for a while the poor lad was actually in danger of collapse.

When reproached he expressed no penitence, but said only that he wished that he had killed him. This he repeated to his mother's face; moreover, he was furious when he found that Bess Catton had been sent away and demanded her return. When told that this was impossible he announced quietly that he would make the place a hell, and kept his word.

For a year or more before this date Barbara had not been well. She suffered from persistent colds which she was unable to shake off, and with these came great depression of spirit. Now in her misery the poor woman went to her room, and falling on her knees prayed with all her heart that she might die. The burden laid upon her was more than she could bear. Only one consolation could she find, that her beloved husband had not lived to share it, for she knew it would have crushed him as it crushed her.

Her father was now very old, and so feeble that everyone screened him from trouble so far as might be. But this particular trouble could not be hid, and Barbara told him all.

"Do not give way, my dearest daughter," he said, "and above all do not seek to fly from your trial, which doubtless is sent to you for some good purpose. Troubles that we strive to escape nearly always recoil upon our heads, whereas if they are faced, often they melt away. If you remain in the world to watch and help him, your son's nature, bad as it seems to be, may yet alter, for after all I know that he loves you. But if you give up and leave the world, who can tell what will happen to him

when he is quite uncontrolled and in possession of his fortune?"

Barbara recognised the truth of her father's words, and while he lived tried to act up to them. But as it happened Mr. Walrond did not live long, for one evening he was found dead in the church, whither he often went to pray.

About this time the doctors told Barbara that her condition of health was somewhat serious. It seemed that her lungs also showed signs of being affected. Perhaps she had contracted the disease from her husband, and now that she was so broken in spirit, it asserted itself. They added, however, that if she took certain precautions, and above all went away from Eastwich, there was every reason to hope that she would quite recover her health.

In the end Barbara did not go away. At the time Anthony was being instructed by a tutor who resided at the Hall to prepare him for the University and ultimately for the Army. Needless to say, she was employed continually in trying to compose the differences between him and this tutor. How then could she go away and leave that poor gentleman and her old mother, who when she was not staying with one of her other married daughters now made her home at the Hall?

Thus she argued to herself, but the truth was that she did not wish to go. Her dearest associations were in the churchyard yonder, the churchyard where she hoped ere long she would be laid. She hated life,

she sought and craved for death. This was her sin.

Night by night she lay awake and thought of Anthony, her darling, her beloved. She remembered that dream of his about a home that awaited him in another world, and she loved to fancy him as dwelling in that place of peace and making ready for her coming.

Nobody thought of him now except herself and his old dog Nell. The dog thought of him, she was sure, for it would sleep beneath his empty bed, and at times sit up, look at it and whine. Then it would come and rest its head upon her as she slept, and she would wake to find it looking at her with a question in its eyes. One night in the darkness it did this, then left her and broke into a joyous whimpering, such as it used to make when its master was going to take it out. She even heard it jumping up as though to paw at him, and wondered dreamily what it could mean.

When she woke in the morning she saw the poor beast lying stiff and cold upon the bed that had been Anthony's, and though she wept over it, her tears were perhaps those of envy rather than of sorrow, for she was sure that it had found Anthony.

More and more Barbara threw out her soul towards Anthony. Across the void of Nothingness she sent it travelling, nor did it return with empty hands. Something of Anthony had greeted it, though she could

not remember the greeting, had spoken with it, though she could not interpret the words. Of this at least she was sure, she had been near to Anthony.

Once she seemed to see him. In the infinite, infinite distance, millions of miles away, the sky opened as it were. There in the opening was Anthony talking with one whom she knew for their daughter, the baby that had died, talking of her. In a minute they were gone, but she had seen them, she was sure that she had seen them, and the knowledge warmed her heart.

So there was no error, the Bible was true, more or less; Faith was not built on running water or on sand. Life was not a mere hellish mockery, where tiaras turned to crowns of thorn and joy was but an inch rule by which to measure the alps of human pain. Life was a door, a gateway. The door dreadful, the gate perilous, if you will, but beyond it lay no dream, no empty blackness. Beyond it stretched the Promised Land peopled with the lost who soon would be the found.

Barbara's last illness was rapid. When she began to go she went swiftly.

"Can't you save her?" asked her son of one of the doctors.

"The disease has gone too far," he answered. "Moreover, it is impossible

to save one who seeks to die."

"Why does she seek to die?" blurted Anthony, glaring at him.

"Perhaps, young gentleman, you are in a better position to answer that question than I am," replied the doctor, who knew of Anthony's cruel conduct to his mother and had reproached him with it, not once but on several occasions.

"You mean that I have killed her," said Anthony savagely.

"No," replied the doctor, "she is dying of tuberculosis of the lungs. What were the primary causes which induced that disease I cannot be sure. All I said was that she appears to welcome it, or rather its issue. And I will add this on my own account, that when she does die the world will lose one of the sweetest women that ever walked upon it. Good morning."

"I know what he means," said Anthony to himself, as he watched the retreating form. "He means that I have murdered her, and perhaps I have. She is sick of me and wants to get back to my father, who was so different. That's why she won't go on living when she might. She is committing suicide--of a holy sort. Well, what made me a brute and her an angel? And when she's gone how will the brute get on without the angel? Why should I be filled with fury and wickedness and she of whom I was born with sweetness and light? Let God or the devil answer that

if they can. My mother, oh! my mother!" and this violent, sinister youth hid his face in his hands and wept.

Barbara sank down and down into a very whirlpool of nothingness. Bending over it, as it were, she saw the face of her aged mother, the faces of some of her dear sisters, the face of the kindly doctor, and lastly the agonised face of her handsome son.

"Mother! Don't leave me, mother. Mother! for God's sake come back to me, mother, or we shall never meet again. Come back to save me!"

These were the last words that Barbara heard.

CHAPTER VIII

THE ATONEMENT

Now these are the things that seemed to happen to Barbara after her earthly death. Or rather some of the things, for most of them have faded away and been lost to her mortal memory.

Consciousness returned to her, but at first it was consciousness in an utter dark. Everywhere was blackness, and in it she was quite alone. The whole universe seemed to centre in her solitary soul. Still she felt no fear, only a kind of wonder at this infinite blank through which she was being borne for millions and millions of miles.

Lights began to shine in the blackness like to those of passing ships upon a midnight sea. Now she was at rest, and the rest was long and sweet. Every fear and sad thought, every sensation of pain or discomfort left her. Peace flowed into her.

Presently she became aware of a weight upon her knee, and wondered by what it could be caused, for it reminded her of something; became aware also that there was light about her. At length her eyes opened and she perceived the light, though dimly, and that it was different to any she had known, purer, more radiant. She perceived also that she lay upon a low couch, and that the weight upon her knee was caused by something shaped like the head of a dog. Nay, it was the head of a dog, and one

she knew well, Anthony's dog, that had died upon his bed. Now she was sure that she dreamed, and in her dream she tried to speak to the dog. The words that her mind formed were:

"Nell! Is that you, Nell?" but she could not utter them.

Still they were answered, for it appeared to her that the dog thought, and that she could read its thought, which was:

"Yes, it is I, who though but a dog, having been the last to leave you, am allowed to be the first to greet you," and it lifted its head and looked at her with eyes full of a wonderful love.

Her heart went out towards the faithful beast in a kind of rapture, and her intelligence formed another question, it was:

"Where am I, and if you, a creature, are here, where are the others?"

"Be patient. I only watch you till they come," was the answer.

"Till they come. Till who come?" she murmured.

Something within told her to inquire no more. But oh! was it possible --was the earth dream coming true?

A long while went by. She looked about her, and understood that she was

lying in a great and beautiful room beneath a dome which seemed to be fashioned of translucent ivory or alabaster. At the end of the room were curtains woven of some glittering stuff that gave out light. At length these curtains were drawn, and through them, bearing a cup in her hand, passed a shape like to that of a mortal woman, only so radiant that Barbara knew that had she been alive with the old life she would have felt afraid.

This shape also was clad in garments that gave out light, and in its hair were jewelled flowers. It glided to her side and looked at her with loving, mysterious eyes. Then it held the cup to her lips, and said, or rather thought, for the speech of that land declared itself in thought and vision:

"Drink of this new wine."

She drank of the wine, and a wonderful life fell upon her like a glory.

"Who are you, O Vision?" she asked, and by way of answer there rose up within her a picture of herself, Barbara, leaning over a cot and looking at the white face of a dead child in a certain room in London. Then she knew that this was her daughter, and stretched out her arms towards her and received her in her arms.

Presently she looked again, and there around the bed appeared four other shapes of beauty.

"You have forgotten us, Barbara," said one of them, "but we are your sisters who died in infancy."

For the third time she looked, and behold! kneeling at her side, just as he had been found kneeling in the church, was her adored father, grown more young. Once more she looked, and last of all, breathing ineffable love, came her lost darling, Anthony himself.

From heart to heart flashed their swift thoughts, like lightnings from cloud to cloud, till all her being was a very sea of joy. Now the great room was full of presences, and now the curtains were gone and all space beyond was full of presences, and from that glorious company of a sudden there arose a song of welcome and beneath the burden of its sweetness she swooned to sleep.

Barbara dwelt in joy with those she loved and learned many things. She learned that this sweet new life of hers was what she had fashioned on the earth with her prayers and strivings; that the seeds of love and suffering sown down in the world's rank soil had here blossomed to this perfect flower. Now she knew what was meant by the saying that the kingdom of Heaven is within you, and by the other saying that as man sows so shall he reap. She learned that in this world beyond the world, and that yet itself was but a rung in the ladder of many universes, up

which ladder all souls must climb to the ultimate judgment, there was sorrow as well as bliss, there were both suffering and delight.

Here the sinful were brought face to face with the naked horror of their sins, and from it fled wailing and aghast. Here the cruel, the covetous, the lustful and the liar were as creatures dragged from black caverns of darkness into the burning light of day. These yearned back to their darkness and attained sometimes to other coverings of a mortal flesh, or to some land of which she had no knowledge. For such was their fate if in them there was no spark of repentant spirit that in this new world could be fanned to flame.

Upwards or downwards, such is the law of the universe in which nothing can stand still. Up from the earth which Barbara had left came the spirit shape of all that lived and could die, even to that of the flower. But down to the earth it seemed that much of it was whirled again, to ascend once more in an age to come, since though the stream of life pulses continually forward, it has its backwash and its eddies.

Barbara learned that though it is blessed to die young and sinless, like to that glorious child of hers with whom she walked in this heavenly creation, and whose task it was to instruct her in its simpler mysteries, to live and to repent is yet more blessed. In this life or in that all have sinned, but not all have repented, and therefore, it appeared to Barbara, again and again such must know the burden of the flesh.

Also she saw many wonders and learned many secrets of that vast, spiritual universe into which this world of ours pours itself day by day. But if she remembers anything of these she cannot tell them.

Oh! happy was her life with Anthony, for there, though now sex as we know it had ceased to be, spirit grew ever closer to spirit, and as below they dreamed and hoped, their union had indeed become an altar on which Love's perfect fire flamed an offering to Heaven. Happy, too, was her communion with those other souls that had been mingled in her lot, and with many more whom she had known aforetime and elsewhere and long forgotten. For Barbara learned that life is an ancient story of which we spell out the chapters one by one.

Yet amidst all this joy and all the blessed labours of a hallowed world in which idleness was not known, nor any weariness in well-doing, a certain shadow met Barbara whichever way she turned.

"What is it?" asked Anthony, who felt her trouble.

"Our son," she answered, and showed him all the tale, or so much of it as he did not know, ending, "And I chose to leave him that I might take my chance of finding you. I died when I might have lived on if I had so willed. That is my sin and it haunts me."

"We are not the parents of his soul, which is as ancient as our own, Barbara."

"No, but for a while it was given into my hand and I deserted it, and now I am afraid. How can I tell what has chanced to the soul of this son of ours? Here there is no time. I know not if I bade it farewell yesterday or ten thousand years ago. Long, long since it may have passed through this world, where it would seem we dwell only with those whom we seek or who seek us. Or it may abide upon the earth and there grow foul and hateful. Let us search out the truth, Anthony. There are those who can open its gates to us if the aim be pure and good."

"After I died, Barbara, I strove to learn how things went with you, and strove in vain."

"Not altogether, Anthony, for sometimes you were very near to me, or so I dreamed. Moreover, the case was different."

"Those who search sometimes find more than they seek, Barbara."

"Doubtless. Still, it is laid on me. Something drives me on."

So by the means appointed they sought to know the truth as to this son

of theirs, and it was decreed that the truth should be known to them.

In a dream, a vision, or perchance in truth--which they never knew--they were drawn to the world that they had left, and the reek of its sins and miseries pierced them like a spear.

They stood in the streets of London near to a certain fantastic gateway that was familiar to them, the gateway of "The Gardens." From within came sounds of music and revelling, for the season was that of summer. A woman descended from a carriage. She was finely dressed, dark and handsome. Barbara knew her at once for the girl Bess Catton, who alone could control her son in his rages and whom she had dismissed for her bad conduct. She entered the place and they entered with her, although she saw them not. Bess sat down, and presently a man whom she seemed to know drew out of the throng and spoke to her. He was a tall man of middle age, with heavy eyes. Looking into his heart, they saw that it was stained with evil. The soul within him lay asleep, wrapped round with the webs of sin. This man said:

"We are going to have a merry supper, Bess. Come and join us."

"I'd like to well enough," she answered, "for I'm tired of my grand life; it's too respectable. But suppose that Anthony came along. He's my lawful spouse, you know. We had words and I told him where I was going."

"Oh, we'll risk your Anthony! Forget your marriage ring and have a taste

of the good old times."

"All right. I'm not afraid of Anthony, never was, but others are. Well, it's your look-out."

She went with the man to a pavilion where food was served, and accompanied him to a room separated by curtains from the main hall. It had open windows which looked out on to the illuminated garden and the dancing. In this room, seated round a table, was a company of women gaudily dressed and painted, and with them were men. One of these was a mere boy now being drawn into evil for the first time, and Barbara grieved for him.

These welcomed the woman Bess and her companion noisily, and made room for them in seats near to the window. Then the meal began, a costly meal at which not much was eaten but a great deal was drunk. The revellers grew excited with wine; they made jests and told doubtful stories.

Barbara's son Anthony entered unobserved and stood with his back against the curtains. He was a man now, tall, powerful, and in his way handsome, with hair of a chestnut red. Just then he who had brought Bess to the supper threw his arm about her and kissed her, whereat she laughed and the others laughed also.

Anthony sprang forward. The table was overthrown. He seized the man and shook him. Then he struck him in the face and hurled him through the

open window to the path below. For a few seconds the man lay there, then rose and ran till presently he vanished beneath the shadow of some trees. There was tumult and confusion in the room; servants rushed in, and one of the men, he who seemed to be the host, talked with them and offered them money. The woman Bess began to revile her husband.

He took her by the arm and said:

"Will you follow that fellow through the window, or will you come with me?"

Glancing at him, she saw something in his face that made her silent. Then they went away together.

The scene changed. Barbara knew that now she saw her Aunt Thompson's London house. In that drawing-room where she had parted from Mr. Russell, her son and his wife stood face to face.

"How dare you?" she gasped through her set lips, glaring at him with fierce eyes.

"How dare you?" he answered. "Did I marry you for this? I have given you everything, my name, the wealth my old aunt left to me; you, you the peasant's child, the evil woman whom I tried to lift up because I loved

you from the first."

"Then you were a fool for your pains, for such as I can't be lifted up."

"And you," he went on, unheeding, "go back to your mire and the herd of your fellow-swine. You ask me how I dare. Go on with these ways, and I tell you I'll dare a good deal more before I've done. I'll be rid of you if I must break your neck and hang for it."

"You can't be rid of me. I'm your lawful wife, and you can prove nothing against me since I married. Do you think I want to be such a one as that mother of yours, to have children and mope myself to the grave----"

"You'd best leave my mother out of it, or by the devil that made you I'll send you after her. Keep her name off your vile lips."

"Why should I? What good did she ever do you? She pretended to be such a saint, but she hated you, and small wonder, seeing what you were. Why she even died to be rid of you. Oh, I know all about it, and you told me as much yourself. If my child is ever born I hope for your sake it will be such another as you are, or as I am. You can take your choice," and with a glare of hate she rushed from the room.

On a table near the fireplace stood spirits. The maddened husband went to them, filled a tumbler half full with brandy, added a little water and drank it off.

He poured more brandy into the glass and began to think. To Barbara his mind was as an open book and she read what was passing there. What she saw were such thoughts as these: "My only comfort, and yet till within two years ago, whatever else I did, I never touched drink. I swore to my mother that I never would, and had she been alive to-day----. But Bess always liked her glass, and drinking alone is no company. Ah! if my mother had lived everything would have been different, for I outgrew the bad fit and might have become quite a decent fellow. But then I met Bess again by chance, and she had the old hold on me, and there was none to keep me back, and she knew how to play her fish until I married her. The old aunt never found it out. If she had I shouldn't have 8,000 pounds a year to-day. I lied to her about that, and I wonder what she thinks of me now, if she can think where she is gone. I wonder what my mother thinks also, and my father, who was a good man by all accounts, though nobody seems to remember much about him. Supposing that they could see me now, supposing that they could have been at that supper party and witnessed the conjugal interview between me and the female creature who is my legal wife, what would they think? Well, they are dead and can't, for the dead don't come back. The dead are just a few double handfuls of dirt, no more, and since no doubt I shall join them before very long, I thank God for it, or rather I would if there were a God to thank. Here's to the company of the Dead who will never hear or see or feel anything more from everlasting to everlasting. Amen."

Then he drank off the second half tumbler of brandy, hid his face in his

hands and began to sob, muttering:

"Mother, why did you leave me? Oh, mother, come back to me, mother, and save my soul from hell!"

Barbara and Anthony awoke from their dream of the dreadful earth and looked into each other's hearts.

"It is true," said their hearts, which could not lie, and with those words all the glory of their state faded to a grey nothingness.

"You have seen and heard," said Barbara. "It was my sin which has brought this misery on our son, who, had I lived on, might have been saved. Now through me he is lost, who step by step of his own will must travel downwards to the last depth, and thence, perhaps, never be raised again. This is the thing that I have done, yes, I whom blind judges in the world held to be good."

"I have seen and heard," he answered, "and joy has departed from me. Yet what wrong have you worked, who did not know?"

"Come, my father," called Barbara to that spirit who in the flesh had been named Septimus Walrond, "come, you who are holy, and pray that light may be given to us."

So he came and prayed and from the Heavens above fell a vision in answer to his prayer. The vision was that of the fate of the soul of the son of Anthony and Barbara through a thousand, thousand ages that were to come, and it was a dreadful fate.

"Pray again, my father," said Barbara, "and ask if it may be changed."

So the spirit of Septimus Walrond prayed, and the spirits of his daughters and of the daughter of Anthony and Barbara prayed with him. Together they kneeled and prayed to the Glory that shone above.

There came another vision, that of a little child leading a man by the hand, and the child was Barbara and the man was he who had been her son. By a long and difficult path--upwards, ever upwards--she led him, and the end of that path was not seen.

Then these spirits prayed that the meaning of this vision might be made more clear. But to that prayer there came no answer.

Barbara went apart into a wilderness where thorns grew and there endured the agony of temptation. On the one hand lay the pure life of joy which, like the difficult path that had been shown to her, led upwards, ever upwards to yet greater joy, shared with those she loved. On the other

hand lay the seething hell of Earth, to be once more endured through many mortal years and--a soul to save alive. None might counsel her, none might direct her. She must choose and choose alone. Not in fear of punishment, for this was not possible to her. Not in hope of glory, for that she must inherit, but only for the hope's sake that she might--save a soul alive.

Out of her deep heart's infinite love and charity thus she chose in atonement of her mortal sin. And as she chose the great arc of Heaven above her, that had been grey and silent, burst to splendour and to song.

So Barbara for a while bade farewell to those who loved her, bade farewell to Anthony her heart's heart. Once more, alone, utterly alone, she laid her on the couch in the great chamber with the translucent dome and thence her spirit was whirled back through nothingness to the hell of Earth, there to be born again in the child of the evil woman, that it might save a soul alive.

Thus did the sweet and holy Barbara--Barbara who came back--in atonement of her sin.

For her reward, as she fights on in hope, she has memory and such visions as are written here.

THE END