## CHAPTER LXI

After throwing George Caresfoot into the bramble-bush, Arthur walked steadily back to the inn, where he arrived, quite composed in manner, at about half-past seven. Old Sam, the ostler, was in the yard, washing a trap. He went up to him, and asked when the next train started for London.

"There is one as leaves Roxham at nine o'clock, sir, and an uncommon fast one, I'm told. But you bean't a-going yet, be you, sir?"

"Yes, have the gig ready in time to catch the train."

"Very good, sir. Been to the fire, I suppose sir?" he went on, dimly perceiving that Arthur's clothes were torn. "It were a fine place, it wore, and it did blaze right beautiful."

"No; what fire?"

"Bless me, sir, didn't you see it last night?--why, Isleworth Hall, to be sure. It wore burnt right out, and all as was in it."

"Oh! How did it come to get burnt?"

"Can't say, sir, but I did hear say how as Lady Bellamy was a-dining there last night along with the squire; the squire he went out

somewhere, my lady she goes home, and the footman he goes to put out the lamp and finds the drawing-room a roaring fiery furnace, like as parson tells us on. But I don't know how that can be, for I heard how as the squire was a-dying, so 'taint likely that he was a-going out. But, lord, sir, folk in these parts do lie that uncommon, 'taint as it be when I was a boy. As like as no, he's no more dying than you are. Anyhow, sir, it all burned like tinder, and the only thing, so I'm told, as was saved was a naked stone statty of a girl with a chain round her wrists, as Jim Blakes, our constable, being in liquor, brought out in his arms, thinking how as it was alive, and tried to rewive it with cold water."

At that moment Sam's story was interrupted by the arrival of a farmer's cart.

"How be you, Sam?"

"Well, I thank yer, for seventy-two, that is, not particular ill."

"Have you a gentleman of the name of Heigham staying here?"

"I am he," said Arthur, "do you want me?"

"No, sir, only the station-master at Roxham asked me to drop this here as it was marked immediate," and he handed Arthur a box.

Arthur thanked him, and, taking it, went up to his room, leaving old Sam delighted to find a new listener to his story of the fire.

It was from the florist, and contained the bouquet he had meant to give Angela on her wedding-day. It had cost him a good deal of thought that bouquet, to say nothing of five guineas of the coin of the realm, and he felt a certain curiosity to look at it, though to do so gave him something of the same sensation that we experience in reading a letter written by some loved hand which we know grew cold before the lines it traced could reach us. He took the box to his room and opened it. The bouquet was a lovely thing, and did credit even to Covent Garden, and the masses of stephanois and orange-bloom, relieved here and there by rising sprays of lilies-of-the-valley, filled the whole room with fragrance.

He drew it from the zinc-well in which it was packed in moss and cotton-wool, and wondered what he should do with it. He could not leave such a thing about, nor would he take it away. Suddenly an idea struck him, and he repacked it in its case as carefully as he could in the original moss and cotton-wool, and then looked about for the sheet of tissue-paper that should complete the covering. He had destroyed it, and had to search for a substitute. In so doing his eye fell upon a long envelope on his dressing-table and he smiled. It contained his marriage licence, and he bethought him that it was a very fair substitute for tissue-paper, and quite as worthless. He extracted it, and, placing it over the flowers, closed up the box. Then he carefully

directed it to "Mrs. George Caresfoot, Abbey House," and, ringing the bell, desired the boots to find a messenger to take it over.

When he had done all this, he sat down and wondered what could have come to him that he could take pleasure in doing a cruel action only worthy of a jealous woman.

Perhaps of all the bitter cups which are held to our lips in this sad world there is none more bitter than that which it was his lot to drink of now. To begin with, the blow fell in youth, when we love or hate, or act, with an ardour and an entire devotion that we give to nothing in after-life. It is then that the heart puts forth its most tender and yet its most lusty shoots, and if they are crushed the whole plant suffers, and sometimes bleeds to death. Arthur had, to an extent quite unrealized by himself until he lost her, centred all his life in this woman, and it was no exaggeration to say, as he had said to her, that she had murdered his heart, and withered up all that was best in it. She had done more, she had inflicted the most cruel injury upon him that a woman can inflict upon a man. She had shaken his belief in her sex at large.

He felt, sitting there in his desolation, that now he had lost Angela he could never be the same man he would otherwise have been. Her cruel desertion had shattered the tinted glass through which youth looks at the world, and he now, before his day, saw it as it is, grim and hard, and full of coarse realities, and did not yet know that time would

again soften down the sharpest of the rough outlines, and throw a garment of its own over the nakedness of life. He was a generous-hearted man and not a vain one, and had he thought that Angela had ceased to care for him and loved this other man, he could have found it in his heart to forgive her, and even to sympathize with her; but he could not think this. Something told him that it was not so. She had contracted herself into a shameful, loveless marriage, and, to gain ends quite foreign to all love, had raised a barrier between them which had no right to exist, and yet one that in this world could, he thought, never be removed.

Misfortunes rain upon us from every quarter of the sky, but so long as they come from the sky we can bear them, for they are beyond the control of our own volition, and must be accepted, as we accept the gale or the lightning. It is the troubles which spring from our own folly and weakness, or from that of those with whom our lives are intertwined, which really crush us. Now Arthur knew enough of the world to be aware that there is no folly to equal that of a woman who, of her own free will, truly loving one man whom she can marry if she will sit, deliberately gives herself to another. It is not only a folly, it is a crime, and, like most crimes, for this life, an irretrievable mistake.

Long before he got back to London, the first unwholesome exaltation of mind that always follows a great misfortune, and which may perhaps be compared with the excitement that for awhile covers the shameful sense

of defeat in an army, had evaporated, and he began to realize the crushing awfulness of the blow which had fallen on him, and to fear lest it should drive him mad. He looked round his little horizon for some straw of comfort at which to catch, and could find none; nothing but dreadful thoughts and sickening visions.

And then suddenly, just as he was sinking into the dulness of despair, there came, like the fist gleam of light in chaotic darkness, the memory of Mildred Carr. Truly she had spoken prophetically. His idol had been utterly cast down and crushed to powder by a hand stronger than his own. He would go to her in his suffering; perhaps she could find means to comfort him.

When he reached town he took a hansom and went to look for some rooms; he would not return to those he had left on the previous afternoon, for the sympathetic landlord had helped him to pack up the wedding clothes and had admired the wedding gift. Arthur felt that he could not face him again. He found some to suit him in Duke Street, St. James, and left his things there. Thence he drove to Fenchurch Street and took a passage to Madeira. The clerk, the same one who had given him his ticket about a year before, remembered him perfectly, and asked him how he got on with Mrs. Carr. But when his passage was taken he was disgusted to find that the mail did not sail for another five days. He looked at his watch, it was only half-past one o'clock. He could scarcely believe what had happened had only occurred that morning, only seven hours ago. It seemed to him that he had stood face

to face with Angela, not that morning, but years ago, and miles away, on some desolate shore which lay on the other side of a dead ocean of pain. And yet it was only seven hours! If the hours went with such heavy wings, how would the days pass, and the months, and the years?

What should he do with himself? In his condition perpetual activity was as necessary to him as air, he must do something to dull the sharp edge of his suffering, or the sword of madness which hung over him by such a slender thread would fall. Suddenly he bethought him of a man whom he had known slightly up at Cambridge, a man of wealth and evil reputation. This man would, he felt, be able to put him in a way of getting through his time. He knew his address and thither he drove.

Four days later, a figure, shrunk, shaky, and looking prematurely old, with the glaze of intoxication scarcely faded from his eye, walked into Mr. Borley's office. That respectable gentleman looked and looked again.

"Good Heavens," he said at length; "it isn't Arthur Heigham."

"Yes, it is, though," said an unequal voice; "I've come for some money. I've got none left and I am going to Madeira to-morrow."

"My dear boy, what has happened to you? You look so very strange. I

have been expecting to see your marriage in the paper. Why, it's only a few days ago that you left to be married."

"A few days, a few years, you mean. I've been jilted, that's all, nothing to speak of, you know, but I had rather not talk about it, if you don't mind. I'm like a nag with a flayed back, don't like the sight of the saddle at present," and poor Arthur, mentally and physically exhausted, put his head down on his arm and gulped.

The old lawyer took in the situation at a glance.

"Hard hit," he said to himself; "and gone on to the burst," and then aloud, "well, well, that has happened to many a man, in fact, you mightn't believe it, but it once happened to me, and I don't look much the worse, do I? But we won't talk about it. The less said of a bad business the better, that's my maxim. And so you are going abroad again. Have you got any friends at Madeira?"

Arthur nodded.

"And you want some more money. Let me see, I sent you 200 pounds last week."

"That was for my wedding tour. I've spent it now. You can guess how I have spent it. Pleasant contrast, isn't it? Gives rise to moral reflections."

"Come, come, Heigham, you must not give way like that. These things happen to most men in the course of their lives, and if they are wise it teaches them that gingerbread isn't all gilt, and to set down women at their proper value, and appreciate a good one if it pleases Providence to give them one in course of time. Don't you go making a fool of yourself over this girl's pretty face. Handsome is as handsome does. These things are hard to bear, I know, but you don't make them any better by pitching your own reputation after a girl's want of stability."

"I know that you are quite right, and I am much obliged to you for your kind advice, but we won't say anything more about it. I suppose that you can let me have some money?"

"Oh yes, if you want it, though I think we shall have to overdraw. What do you want? Two hundred? Here is the cheque."

"I am anxious about that young fellow," said Mr. Borley to himself, in the pause between Arthur's departure and the entry of the next client. "I hope his disappointment won't send him to the dogs. He is not of the sort who take it easy, like I did, for instance. Dear me, that is a long while ago now. I wonder what the details of his little affair were, and who the girl married. Captain Shuffle! yes, show him in."