CHAPTER VII

MR. KNIGHT AND DUTY

The pair returned to Kleindorf by the evening diligence, and among the passengers was that same priest who had been their companion on the day of Godfrey's arrival. As usual he was prepared to be bellicose, and figuratively, trailed the tails of his coat before his ancient enemy. But the Pasteur would not tread on them. Indeed, so mild and conciliatory were his answers that at last the priest, who was a good soul at bottom, grew anxious and inquired if he were ill.

"No, no," said a voice from the recesses of the dark coach, "Monsieur le Pasteur has come into money. Oh, I have heard!"

"Is it so? Now I understand," remarked the priest with a sniff, "I feared that he had lost his health."

Then they arrived at Kleindorf, and the conversation ended with mutual bows.

Great was the excitement of Madame and Juliette at the news which they brought with them. To their ears Godfrey's inheritance sounded a tale of untold wealth, nearly 300,000 francs! Why, they did not know anyone in the neighbourhood of Kleindorf who owned so much. And then that fine house, with its gardens and lovely furniture, which was the talk of

Lucerne. And the Pasteur with his 5,000 francs clear to be paid immediately, plus an income of 2,500 for the next eight years. Here were riches indeed. It was wonderful, and all after an acquaintance of only a few months. They looked at Godfrey with admiration. Truly he must be a remarkable youth who was thus able to attract the love of the wealthy.

An idea occurred to Madame. Why should he not marry Juliette? She was vivacious and pretty, fit in every way to become a great lady, even perhaps to adorn the lovely Villa Ogilvy in future years. She would have a word with Juliette, and show her where fortune lay. If the girl had any wit it should be as good as assured, for with her opportunities----

And so, doubtless, it might have chanced had it not been for a certain determined and unconventional young woman far away in England, of whom the persistent memory, however much he might flirt, quite prevented Godfrey from falling in love, as otherwise he ought to, and indeed, probably must have done at his age and in his circumstances.

Perhaps Miss Juliette, who although young was no fool, also had ideas upon the subject, at any rate at this time, especially as she had found l'Hibou always attractive, notwithstanding his star-gazing ways, and the shower of wealth that had descended on him as though direct from the Bon Dieu, did not lessen his charms. If so, who could blame her? When one has been obliged always to look at both sides of a sou and

really pretty frocks, such as ladies wear, are almost as unobtainable as Godfrey's stars, money becomes important, especially to a girl with an instinct for dress and a love of life.

Thenceforward, at least, as may be imagined, Monsieur Godfrey became a very prominent person indeed in the Boiset establishment. All his little tastes were consulted; Madame moved him into the best spare bedroom, on the ground that the one he occupied would be cold in winter, which, when he was out, Juliette made a point of adorning with flowers if these were forthcoming, or failing them with graceful sprays of winter berries. Also she worked him some slippers covered with little devils in black silk, which she said he must learn to tread under foot, though whether this might be a covert allusion to his spiritualistic experiences or merely a flight of fancy on her part, Godfrey did not know.

On the evening of the reading of the will, prompted thereto by the Pasteur, that young gentleman wrote a letter to his father, a task which he always thought difficult, to tell him what had happened. As he found explanations impossible, it was brief, though the time occupied in composing drafts, was long. Finally it took the following form:--

"My dear Father,--I think I told you that I travelled out here with a lady named Miss Ogilvy, whom I have often seen since. She has just died and left me, as I understand, about £12,000, which I am to get when I am twenty-five. Meanwhile I am to have the income,

so I am glad to say I shall not cost you any more. Also she has left me a large house in Lucerne with a beautiful garden and a lot of fine furniture, and some money to keep it up. As I can't live there, I suppose it will have to be let.

"I hope you are very well. Please give my love to Mrs. Parsons and tell her about this. It is growing very cold here, and the mountains are covered with snow, but there has been little frost. I am getting on well with my French, which I talk with Mademoiselle Juliette, who knows no English, although she thinks she does. She is a pretty girl and sings nicely. Madame, too, is very charming. I work at the other things with the Pasteur, who is kind to me. He will write to you also and I will enclose his letter.

"Your affectionate son, "Godfrey."

The receipt of this epistle caused astonishment in Mr. Knight, not unmixed with irritation. Why could not the boy be more explicit? Who was Miss Ogilvy, whose name, so far as he could recollect, he now heard for the first time, and how did she come to leave Godfrey so much money? The story was so strange that he began to wonder whether it were a joke, or perhaps, an hallucination. If not, there must be a great deal unrevealed. The letter which Godfrey said the Pasteur would write was not enclosed, and if it had been, probably would not have helped him much as he did not understand French, and could scarcely decipher

his cramped calligraphy. Lastly, he had heard nothing from any lawyers or trustees.

In his bewilderment he went straight to Hawk's Hall, taking the letter with him, with a view to borrowing books of reference which might enable him to identify Miss Ogilvy. The butler said that he thought Sir John was in and showed him to the morning room, where he found Isobel, who informed him that her father had just gone out. Their meeting was not affectionate, for as has been told, Isobel detested Mr. Knight, and he detested Isobel. Moreover, there was a reason, which shall be explained, which just then made him feel uncomfortable in her presence. Being there, however, he thought it necessary to explain the object of his visit.

"I have had a very strange letter from that odd boy, Godfrey," he said, "which makes me want to borrow a book. Here it is, perhaps you will read it, as it will save time and explanation."

"I don't want to read Godfrey's letters," said Isobel, stiffly.

"It will save time," repeated Mr. Knight, thrusting it towards her.

Then, being overcome by curiosity, she read it. The money part did not greatly interest her; money was such a common thing of which she heard so much. What interested her were, first, Miss Ogilvy and the unexplained reasons of her bequest, and secondly, in a more acute

fashion, Mademoiselle Boiset, who was pretty and sang so nicely. Miss Ogilvy, whoever she might have been, at any rate, was dead, but Juliette clearly was much alive, with her prettiness and good voice. No wonder, then, that she had not heard from Godfrey. He was too occupied with the late Miss Ogilvy and the very present Mademoiselle Juliette, in whose father's house he was living as one of the family.

Isobel's face, however, showed none of her wonderings. She read the letter quite composedly, but with such care that afterwards she could have repeated it by heart. Then she handed it back, saying:

"Well, Godfrey seems to have been fortunate."

"Yes, but why? I find no explanation of this bequest--if there is a bequest."

"No doubt there is, Mr. Knight. Godfrey was always most truthful and above-board," she answered, looking at him.

Mr. Knight flinched and coloured at her words, and the steady gaze of those grey eyes. She wondered why though she was not to learn for a long while.

"I thought perhaps you could lend me some book, or books, which would enable me to find out about Miss Ogilvy. I have never heard of her before, though I think that in one of his brief communications Godfrey

did mention a lady who was kind to him in the train."

"Certainly, there are lots of them. 'Who's Who'--only she would not be there unless she was very rich, but you might look. Peerages; they're no good as she was Miss Ogilvy, though, of course, she might be the daughter of a baron. 'County Families,' Red Books, etc. Let's try some of them."

So they did try. Various Ogilvys there were, but none who gave them any clue. This was not strange, as both Miss Ogilvy's parents had died in Australia, when she was young, leaving her to be brought up by an aunt of another name in England, who was also long dead.

So Mr. Knight retreated baffled. Next morning, however, a letter arrived addressed "Godfrey Knight, Esq.," which after his pleasing fashion he opened promptly. It proved to be a communication from a well-known firm of lawyers, which enclosed a copy of Miss Ogilvy's will, called special attention to the codicil affecting himself, duly executed before the British Consul and his clerk in Lucerne, gave the names of the English trustees, solicited information as to where the interest on the sum bequeathed was to be paid, and so forth.

To this inquiry Mr. Knight at once replied that the moneys might be paid to him as the father of the legatee, and was furious when all sorts of objections were raised to that course, unless every kind of guarantee were given that they would be used solely and strictly for

the benefit of his son. Finally, an account had to be opened on which cheques could be drawn signed by one of the trustees and Mr. Knight. This proviso made the latter even more indignant than before, especially as it was accompanied by an intimation that the trustees would require his son's consent, either by letter or in a personal interview, to any arrangements as to his career, etc., which involved expenditure of the trust moneys. When a somewhat rude and lengthy letter to them to that effect was met with a curt acknowledgment of its receipt and a reference to their previous decision, Mr. Knight's annoyance hardened into a permanent grievance against his son, whom he seemed to hold responsible for what he called an "affront" to himself.

He was a man with large ideas of paternal rights, of which an example may be given that was not without its effect upon the vital interests of others.

When Isobel returned from London, after the fancy-dress ball, at which she thought she had seen a ghost whilst sitting in the square with her young admirer who was dressed as a knight, she waited for a long while expecting to receive a letter from Godfrey. As none came, although she knew from Mrs. Parsons that he had written home several times, she began to wonder as to the cause of his silence. Then an idea occurred to her.

Supposing that what she had seen was no fancy of her mind, but Godfrey himself, who in some mysterious fashion had found his way into that square, perhaps in the hope of seeing her at the ball in order to say goodbye? This was possible, since she had ascertained from some casual remark by his father that he did not leave London until the following morning.

If this had happened, if he had seen her "playing the fool," as she expressed it to herself with that good-looking man in the square, what would he have thought of her? She never paused to remember that he had no right to think anything. Somehow from childhood she acknowledged in her heart that he had every right, though when she said this to herself, she did not in the least understand all that the admission conveyed. Although she bullied and maltreated him at times, yet to herself she always confessed him to be her lord and master. He was the one male creature for whom she cared in the whole world, indeed, putting her mother out of the question, she cared for no other man or woman, and would never learn to do so.

For hers was a singular and very rare instance of almost undivided affection centred on a single object. So far as his sex was concerned Godfrey was her all, a position of which any man might well be proud in the case of any woman, and especially of one who had many opportunities of devoting herself to others. In her example, however, she was not to be thanked, for the reason that she only followed her nature, or perhaps the dictates of that fate which inspires and rules very great

love, whether it be between man and woman, between parent and child, between brother and brother, or between friend and friend. Such feelings do not arise, or grow. They simply are; the blossoms of a plant that has its secret roots far away in the soil of Circumstance beyond our ken, and that, mayhap, has pushed its branches through existences without number, and in the climates of many worlds.

So at least it was with Isobel, and so it had always been since she kissed the sleeping child in the old refectory of the Abbey. She was his, and in a way, however much she might doubt or mistrust, her inner sense and instinct told her that he was always hers, that so he had always been and so always would remain. With the advent of womanhood these truths came home to her with an increased force because she knew--again by instinct--that this fact of womanhood multiplied the chances of attainment to the unity which she desired, however partial that might still prove to be.

Yet she knew also that this great mutual attraction did not depend on sex, though by the influence of sex it might be quickened and accentuated. It was something much more deep and wide, something which she did not and perhaps never would understand. The sex element was accidental, so much so that the passage of a few earthly years would rob it of its power to attract and make it as though it had never been, but the perfect friendship between their souls was permanent and without shadow of change. She knew, oh!, she knew, although no word of it had ever been spoken between them, that theirs was the Love Eternal.

The quick perception of her woman's mind told her these things, of which Godfrey's in its slower growth was not yet aware.

Animated by this new idea that she had really seen Godfrey, and what was much worse, that Godfrey had really seen her upon an occasion when she would have much preferred to remain invisible to him, she was filled with remorse, and determined to write him a letter. Like that of the young man himself to his father, its composition took her a good deal of time.

Here it is as copied from her third and final draft:--

"My dear old Godfrey,--I have an idea that you were in the Square on the night of the fancy ball when I came out, and wore that horrid Plantagenet dress which, after all, did not fit. (I sent it to a jumble-sale where no one would buy it, so I gave it to Mrs. Smilie, who has nine children, to cut into frocks for her little girls.) If you were there, instead of resting before your long journey as you ought to have done, and saw me with a man in armour and a rose--and the rest, of course you will have understood that this was all part of the game. You see, we had to pretend that we were knights and ladies who, when they were not cutting throats or being carried off with their hair down, seem to have wasted their time in giving each other favours, and all that sort of bosh. (We did not know what a favour was, so we used a rose.) The truth is that the young man and his armour, especially his spurs which tore

my dress, and everything about him bored me, the more so because all the while I was thinking of--well, other things--how you would get through your journey, and like those French people and the rest. So now, if you were there, you won't be cross, and if you were not, and don't understand what I am saying, it isn't worth bothering about. In any case, you had no right to--I mean, be cross. It is I who should be cross with you for poking about in a London square so late and not coming forward to say how do you do and be introduced to the knight. That is all I have to say about the business, so don't write and ask me any questions.

"There is no news here--there never is--except that I haven't been into that church since you left, and don't mean to, which makes your father look at me as sourly as though he had eaten a whole hatful of crab-apples. He hates me, you know, and I rather like him for showing it, as it saves me the trouble of trying to keep up appearances. Do tell me, when you write, how to explain his ever having been your father. If he still wants you to go into the Church I advise you to study the Thirty-nine Articles. I read them all through yesterday, and how anybody can swear to them in this year of grace I'm sure I don't know. They must shut their eyes and open their mouths, like we used to do when we took powders. By the way, did you ever read anything about Buddhism? I've got a book on it which I think rather fine. At any rate, it is a great idea, though I think I should find it difficult to follow 'the Way.'

"I am sorry to say that Mother is not well at all. She coughs a great deal now that Essex is getting so damp, and grows thinner and thinner. The doctor says she ought to go to Egypt, only Father won't hear of it. But I won't write about that or we should have another argument on the fourth Commandment. Good-bye, dear old boy.--Your affectionate Isobel.

"P.S.--When you write don't tell me all about Switzerland and snow-covered mountains and blue, bottomless lakes, etc., which I can read in books. Tell me about yourself and what you are doing and thinking--especially what you are thinking.

"P.P.S.--That man in armour isn't really good-looking; he has a squint. Also he puts scent upon his hair and can't spell. I know because he tried to write a bit of poetry on my programme and got it all wrong."

When she had finished this somewhat laboured epistle Isobel remembered that she had forgotten to ask Godfrey to write down his address. Bethinking her that it would be known to Mrs. Parsons, she took it round to the Abbey House, proposing to add it there. As it happened Mrs. Parsons was out, so she left it with the housemaid, who promised faithfully to give it to her when she returned, with Isobel's message as to writing the address on the sealed envelope. In order that she might not forget, the maid placed it on a table by the back door. By

ill luck, however, presently through that door, came, not Mrs. Parsons, but the Rev. Mr. Knight. He saw the letter addressed to Godfrey Knight, Esq., and, though he half pretended to himself that he did not, at once recognized Isobel's large, upright hand. Taking it from the table he carried it with him into his study and there contemplated it for a while.

"That pernicious girl is communicating with Godfrey," he said to himself, "which I particularly wish to prevent."

A desire came upon him to know what was in the letter, and he began to argue with himself as to his "duty"--that was the word he used. Finally he concluded that as Godfrey was still so young and so open to bad influences from that quarter, this duty clearly indicated that he should read the letter before it was forwarded. In obedience to this high impulse he opened and read it, with the result that by the time it was finished there was perhaps no more angry clergyman in the British Empire. The description of himself looking as though he had eaten a hatful of crab-apples; the impious remarks about the Thirty-nine Articles; the suggestion that Godfrey, instead of going to bed as he had ordered him to do that evening, was wandering about London at midnight; the boldly announced intention of the writer of not going to church--indeed, every word of it irritated him beyond bearing.

"Well," he said aloud, "I do not think that I am called upon to spend twopence-halfpenny" (for Isobel had forgotten the stamp) "in forwarding

such poisonous trash to a son whom I should guard from evil. Hateful girl! At any rate she shall have no answer to this effusion."

Then he put the letter into a drawer which he locked.

As a consequence, naturally, Isobel did receive "no answer," a fact from which she drew her own conclusions. Indeed, it would not be too much to say that these seared her soul. She had written to Godfrey, she had humbled herself before Godfrey, and he sent her--no answer. It never occurred to her to make inquiries as to the fate of that letter, except once when she asked the housemaid whom she chanced to meet, whether she had given it to Mrs. Parsons. The girl, whose brain, or whatever represented that organ, was entirely fixed upon a young man in the village of whom she was jealous, answered, yes. Perhaps she had entirely forgotten the incident, or perhaps she considered the throwing of the letter upon a table as equivalent to delivery.

At any rate, Isobel, who thought, like most other young people, that when they once have written something, it is conveyed by a magical agency to the addressee, even if left between the leaves of a blotter, accepted the assurance as conclusive. Without doubt the letter had gone and duly arrived, only Godfrey did not choose to answer it, that was all. Perhaps this might be because he was still angry on account of the knight in armour--oh! how she hoped that this was the reason, but, as her cold, common sense, of which she had an unusual share, convinced her, much more probably the explanation was that he was engaged

otherwise, and did not think it worth while to take the trouble to write.

Later on, it is true, she did mean to ask Mrs. Parsons whether she had forwarded the letter. But as it chanced, before she did so, that good woman burst into a flood of conversation about Godfrey, saying how happy he seemed to be in his new home with such nice ladies around, who it was plain, thought so much of him, and so forth. This garrulity Isobel took as an intended hint and ceased from her contemplated queries. When some months later Mr. Knight brought her Godfrey's epistle which announced his inheritance, needless to say, everything became plain as a pikestaff to her experienced intelligence.

So it came about that two young people, who adored each other, were estranged for a considerable length of time. For Isobel wrote no more letters, and the proud and outraged Godfrey would rather have died than attempt to open a correspondence--after what he had seen in that London square. It is true that in his brief epistles home, which were all addressed to his father, since Mrs. Parsons was what is called "a poor scholar," he did try in a roundabout way to learn something about Isobel, but these inquiries, for reasons of his own, his parent completely ignored. In short, she might have been dead for all that Godfrey heard of her, as he believed that she was dead--to him.

Meanwhile, Isobel had other things to occupy her. Her mother, as she had said in the letter which Mr. Knight's sense of duty compelled him

to steal, became very ill with lung trouble. The doctors announced that she ought to be taken to Egypt or some other warm climate, such as Algeria, for the winter months. Sir John would hear nothing of the sort. For years past he had chosen to consider that his wife was hypochondriacal, and all the medical opinions in London would not have induced him to change that view. The fact was, as may be guessed, that it did not suit him to leave England, and that for sundry reasons which need not be detailed, he did not wish that Isobel should accompany her mother to what he called "foreign parts." In his secret heart he reflected that if Lady Jane died, well, she died, and while heaven gained a saint, earth, or at any rate, Sir John Blake, would be no loser. She had played her part in his life, there was nothing more to be made of her either as a woman as a social asset. What would it matter if one more pale, uninteresting lady of title joined the majority?

Isobel had one of her stormy interviews with Sir John upon this matter of her mother's health.

"She ought to go abroad," she said.

"Who told you that?" asked her father.

"The doctors. I waited for them and asked them."

"Then you had no business to do so. You are an impertinent and

interfering chit."

"Is it impertinent and interfering to be anxious about one's mother's health, even if one is a chit?" inquired Isobel, looking him straight in the eyes.

Then he broke out in his coarse way, saying things to his daughter of which he should have been ashamed.

She waited until he ceased, red-faced, and gasping, and replied:

"Were it not for my mother, whom you abuse, although she is such an angel and has always been so kind to you, I would leave you, Father, and earn my own living, or go with my uncle Edgar to Mexico, where he is to be appointed Minister, as he and Aunt Margaret asked me to. As it is I shall stop here, though if anything happens to Mother, because you will not send her abroad, I shall go if I have to run away. Why won't you let her go?" she added with a change of voice. "You need not come; I could look after her. If you think that Egypt or the other place is too far, you know the doctors say that perhaps Switzerland would do her good, and that is quite near."

He caught hold of this suggestion, and exclaimed, with a sneer:

"I know why you want to go to Switzerland, Miss. To run after that whipper-snapper of a parson's son, eh? Well, you shan't. And as for why

I won't let her go, it's because I don't believe those doctors, who say one minute that she should go to Egypt, which is hot, and the next to Switzerland, which is cold. Moreover, I mean you to stop in England, and not go fooling about with a lot of strange men in these foreign places. You are grown up now and out, and I have my own plans for your future, which can't come off if you are away. We stop here till Christmas, and then go to London. There, that's all, so have done."

At these insults, especially that which had to do with Godfrey, Isobel turned perfectly scarlet and bit her lip till the blood ran. Then without another word she went away, leaving him, if the truth were known, a little frightened. Still, he would not alter his decision, partly because to do so must interfere with his plans, and he was a very obstinate man, and partly because he refused to be beaten by Isobel. This was, he felt, a trial of strength between them, and if he gave way now, she would be master. His wife's welfare did not enter into his calculations.

So they stopped in Essex, where matters went as the doctors had foretold, only more quickly than they expected. Lady Jane's complaint grew rapidly worse, so rapidly that soon there was no question of her going abroad. At the last moment Sir John grew frightened, as bullies are apt to do, and on receipt of an indignant letter from Lord Lynfield, now an old man, who had been informed of the facts by his grand-daughter, offered to send his wife to Egypt, or anywhere else. Again the doctors were called in to report, and told him with brutal

frankness that if their advice had been taken when it was first given, probably she would have lived for some years. As it was, it was impossible for her to travel, since the exertion might cause her death upon the journey, especially if she became seasick.

This verdict came to Isobel's knowledge as the first had done. Indeed, in his confusion, emphasized by several glasses of port, her father blurted it out himself.

"I wonder whether you will ever be sorry," was her sole comment.

Then she sat down to watch her mother die, and to think. Could there be any good God, she wondered, if He allowed such things to happen. Poor girl! it was her first experience of the sort, and as yet she did not know what things are allowed to happen in this world in obedience to the workings of unalterable laws by whoever and for whatever purpose these may be decreed.

Being ignorant, however, and still very young and untaught of life, she could not be expected to take these large views, or to guess at the Hand of Mercy which holds the cup of human woes. She saw her mother fading away because of her father's obstinacy and self-seeking, and it was inconceivable to her that such an unnecessary thing could be allowed by a gentle and loving Providence. Therefore, she turned her back on Providence, as many a strong soul has done before her, rejecting it for the reason that she could not understand.

Had she but guessed, this attitude of hers, which could not be concealed entirely in the case of a nature so frank, was the bitterest drop in her mother's draught of death. She, poor gentle creature, made no complaints, but only excuses for her husband's conduct. Nor, save for Isobel's sake did she desire to live. Her simple faith upbore her through the fears of departure, and assured her of forgiveness for all errors, and of happiness beyond in a land where there was one at least whom she wished to meet.

"I won't try to argue with you, because I am not wise enough to understand such things," she said to Isobel, "but I wish, dearest, that you would not be so certain as to matters which are too high for us."

"I can't help it, Mother," she answered.

Lady Jane looked at her and smiled, and then said:

"No, darling, you can't help it now, but I am sure that a time must come when you will think differently. I say this because something tells me that it is so, and the knowledge makes me very happy. You see we must all of us go through darkness and storms in life; that is if we are worth anything, for, of course, there are people who do not feel. Yet at the end there is light, and love, and peace, for you as well as for me, Isobel; yes, and for all of us who have tried to trust and to repent of what we have done wrong."

"As you believe it I hope that it is true; indeed, I think that it must be true, Mother dear," said Isobel with a little sob.

The subject was never discussed between them again, but although Isobel showed no outward change of attitude, from that time forward till the end, her mother seemed much easier in her mind about her and her views.

"It will all come right. We shall meet again. I know it. I know it," were her last words.

She died quite suddenly on the 27th of December, the day upon which Sir John had announced that they were to move to London.

As a matter of fact, one of the survivors of this trio was to move much further than to London, namely, Isobel herself. It happened thus. The funeral was over; the relatives and the few friends who attended it had departed to their rooms if they were stopping in the house, or elsewhere; Isobel and her father were left alone. She confronted him, a tall, slim figure, whose thick blonde hair and pale face contrasted strikingly with her black dress. Enormous in shape, for so Sir John had grown, carmine-coloured shading to purle about the shaved chin and lips (which were also of rather a curious hue), bald-headed, bold yet shifty-eyed, also clad in black, with a band of crape like to that of a

Victorian mute, about his shining tall hat, he leaned against the florid, marble mantelpiece, a huge obese blot upon its whiteness. They were a queer contrast, as dissimilar perhaps as two human beings well could be.

For a while there was silence between them, which he, whose nerves were not so young or strong as his daughter's, was the first to break.

"Well, she's dead, poor dear," he said.

"Yes," answered Isobel, her pent-up indignation bursting forth, "and you killed her."

Then he too burst forth.

"Damn you, what do you mean, you little minx?" he asked. "Why do you say I killed her, because I did what I thought the best for all of us? No woman had a better husband, as I am sure she acknowledges in heaven to-day."

"I don't know what Mother thinks in heaven, if there is one for her, as there ought to be. But I do know what I think on earth," remarked the burning Isobel.

"And I know what I think also," shouted her enraged parent, dashing the new, crape-covered hat on to the table in front of him, "and it is that

the further you and I are apart from each other, the better we are likely to get on."

"I agree with you, Father."

"Look here, Isobel, you said that your uncle Edgar, who has been appointed Minister to Mexico, offered to take you with him to be a companion to his daughter, your cousin Emily. Well, you can go if you like. I'll pay the shot and shut up this house for a while. I'm sick of the cursed place, and can get to Harwich just as well from London. Write and make the arrangements, for one year, no more. By that time your temper may have improved," he added with an ugly sneer.

"Thank you, Father, I will."

He stared at her for a little while. She met his gaze unflinchingly, and in the end it was not her eyes that dropped. Then with a smothered exclamation he stamped out of the room, kicking Isobel's little terrier out of the path with his elephantine foot. The poor beast, of which she was very fond, limped to her whining, for it was much hurt. She took it in her arms and kissed it, weeping tears of wrath and pity.

"I wonder what Godfrey would say about the fifth Commandment if he had been here this afternoon, you poor thing," she whispered to the whimpering dog, which was licking its hanging leg. "There is no God. If there had been He would not have given me such a father, or my mother

such a husband."

Then still carrying the injured terrier, she went out and glided through the darkness to her mother's grave in the neighbouring churchyard. The sextons had done their work, and the raw, brown earth of the grave, mixed with bits of decayed coffins and fragments of perished human bones, was covered with hot-house flowers. Among these lay a gorgeous wreath of white and purple orchids, to which was tied a card whereon was written: "To my darling wife, from her bereaved husband, John Blake."

Isobel lifted the wreath from its place of honour and threw it over the the churchyard wall. Then she wept and wept as though her heart would break.