

## IX. THE EVENTS OF TEN WEEKS

### 1. FROM SEPTEMBER THE TWENTY-FIRST TO THE MIDDLE OF NOVEMBER

The foremost figure within Cytherea's horizon, exclusive of the inmates of Knapwater House, was now the steward, Mr. Manston. It was impossible that they should live within a quarter of a mile of each other, be engaged in the same service, and attend the same church, without meeting at some spot or another, twice or thrice a week. On Sundays, in her pew, when by chance she turned her head, Cytherea found his eyes waiting desirously for a glimpse of hers, and, at first more strangely, the eyes of Miss Aldclyffe furtively resting on him. On coming out of church he frequently walked beside Cytherea till she reached the gate at which residents in the House turned into the shrubbery. By degrees a conjecture grew to a certainty. She knew that he loved her.

But a strange fact was connected with the development of his love. He was palpably making the strongest efforts to subdue, or at least to hide, the weakness, and as it sometimes seemed, rather from his own conscience than from surrounding eyes. Hence she found that not one of his encounters with her was anything more than the result of pure accident. He made no advances whatever: without avoiding her, he never sought her: the words he had whispered at their first interview now proved themselves to be quite as much the result of unguarded impulse as was her answer. Something held him back, bound his impulse down, but

she saw that it was neither pride of his person, nor fear that she would refuse him--a course she unhesitatingly resolved to take should he think fit to declare himself. She was interested in him and his marvellous beauty, as she might have been in some fascinating panther or leopard--for some undefinable reason she shrank from him, even whilst she admired. The keynote of her nature, a warm 'precipitance of soul,' as Coleridge happily writes it, which Manston had so directly pounced upon at their very first interview, gave her now a tremulous sense of being in some way in his power.

The state of mind was, on the whole, a dangerous one for a young and inexperienced woman; and perhaps the circumstance which, more than any other, led her to cherish Edward's image now, was that he had taken no notice of the receipt of her letter, stating that she discarded him. It was plain then, she said, that he did not care deeply for her, and she thereupon could not quite leave off caring deeply for him:--

'Ingenium mulierum,  
Nolunt ubi velis, ubi nolis cupiunt ultro.'

The month of October passed, and November began its course. The inhabitants of the village of Carriford grew weary of supposing that Miss Aldclyffe was going to marry her steward. New whispers arose and became very distinct (though they did not reach Miss Aldclyffe's ears) to the effect that the steward was deeply in love with Cytherea Graye. Indeed, the fact became so obvious that there was nothing left to

say about it except that their marriage would be an excellent one for both;--for her in point of comfort--and for him in point of love.

As circles in a pond grow wider and wider, the next fact, which at first had been patent only to Cytherea herself, in due time spread to her neighbours, and they, too, wondered that he made no overt advances. By the middle of November, a theory made up of a combination of the other two was received with general favour: its substance being that a guilty intrigue had been commenced between Manston and Miss Aldclyffe, some years before, when he was a very young man, and she still in the enjoyment of some womanly beauty, but now that her seniority began to grow emphatic she was becoming distasteful to him. His fear of the effect of the lady's jealousy would, they said, thus lead him to conceal from her his new attachment to Cytherea. Almost the only woman who did not believe this was Cytherea herself, on unmistakable grounds, which were hidden from all besides. It was not only in public, but even more markedly in secluded places, on occasions when gallantry would have been safe from all discovery, that this guarded course of action was pursued, all the strength of a consuming passion burning in his eyes the while.

## 2. NOVEMBER THE EIGHTEENTH

It was on a Friday in this month of November that Owen Graye paid a visit to his sister.

His zealous integrity still retained for him the situation at Budmouth,

and in order that there should be as little interruption as possible to his duties there, he had decided not to come to Knapwater till late in the afternoon, and to return to Budmouth by the first train the next morning, Miss Aldclyffe having made a point of frequently offering him lodging for an unlimited period, to the great pleasure of Cytherea.

He reached the house about four o'clock, and ringing the bell, asked of the page who answered it for Miss Graye.

When Graye spoke the name of his sister, Manston, who was just coming out from an interview with Miss Aldclyffe, passed him in the vestibule and heard the question. The steward's face grew hot, and he secretly clenched his hands. He half crossed the court, then turned his head and saw that the lad still stood at the door, though Owen had been shown into the house. Manston went back to him.

'Who was that man?' he said.

'I don't know, sir.'

'Has he ever been here before?'

'Yes, sir.'

'How many times?'

'Three.'

'You are sure you don't know him?'

'I think he is Miss Graye's brother, sir.'

'Then, why the devil didn't you say so before!' Manston exclaimed, and again went on his way.

'Of course, that was not the man of my dreams--of course, it couldn't be!' he said to himself. 'That I should be such a fool--such an utter fool. Good God! to allow a girl to influence me like this, day after day, till I am jealous of her very brother. A lady's dependent, a waif, a helpless thing entirely at the mercy of the world; yes, curse it; that is just why it is; that fact of her being so helpless against the blows of circumstances which renders her so deliciously sweet!'

He paused opposite his house. Should he get his horse saddled? No.

He went down the drive and out of the park, having started to proceed to an outlying spot on the estate concerning some draining, and to call at the potter's yard to make an arrangement for the supply of pipes. But a remark which Miss Aldclyffe had dropped in relation to Cytherea was what still occupied his mind, and had been the immediate cause of his excitement at the sight of her brother. Miss Aldclyffe had meaningfully remarked during their intercourse, that Cytherea was wildly in love with

Edward Springrove, in spite of his engagement to his cousin Adelaide.

'How I am harassed!' he said aloud, after deep thought for half-an-hour, while still continuing his walk with the greatest vehemence. 'How I am harassed by these emotions of mine!' He calmed himself by an effort.

'Well, duty after all it shall be, as nearly as I can effect it.

"Honesty is the best policy;" with which vigorously uttered resolve he once more attempted to turn his attention to the prosy object of his journey.

The evening had closed in to a dark and dreary night when the steward came from the potter's door to proceed homewards again. The gloom did not tend to raise his spirits, and in the total lack of objects to attract his eye, he soon fell to introspection as before. It was along the margin of turnip fields that his path lay, and the large leaves of the crop struck flatly against his feet at every step, pouring upon them the rolling drops of moisture gathered upon their broad surfaces; but the annoyance was unheeded. Next reaching a fir plantation, he mounted the stile and followed the path into the midst of the darkness produced by the overhanging trees.

After walking under the dense shade of the inky boughs for a few minutes, he fancied he had mistaken the path, which as yet was scarcely familiar to him. This was proved directly afterwards by his coming at right angles upon some obstruction, which careful feeling with outstretched hands soon told him to be a rail fence. However, as the

wood was not large, he experienced no alarm about finding the path again, and with some sense of pleasure halted awhile against the rails, to listen to the intensely melancholy yet musical wail of the fir-tops, and as the wind passed on, the prompt moan of an adjacent plantation in reply. He could just dimly discern the airy summits of the two or three trees nearest him waving restlessly backwards and forwards, and stretching out their boughs like hairy arms into the dull sky. The scene, from its striking and emphatic loneliness, began to grow congenial to his mood; all of human kind seemed at the antipodes.

A sudden rattle on his right hand caused him to start from his reverie, and turn in that direction. There, before him, he saw rise up from among the trees a fountain of sparks and smoke, then a red glare of light coming forward towards him; then a flashing panorama of illuminated oblong pictures; then the old darkness, more impressive than ever.

The surprise, which had owed its origin to his imperfect acquaintance with the topographical features of that end of the estate, had been but momentary; the disturbance, a well-known one to dwellers by a railway, being caused by the 6.50 down-train passing along a shallow cutting in the midst of the wood immediately below where he stood, the driver having the fire-door of the engine open at the minute of going by. The train had, when passing him, already considerably slackened speed, and now a whistle was heard, announcing that Carriford Road Station was not far in its van.

But contrary to the natural order of things, the discovery that it was only a commonplace train had not caused Manston to stir from his position of facing the railway.

If the 6.50 down-train had been a flash of forked lightning transfixing him to the earth, he could scarcely have remained in a more trance-like state. He still leant against the railings, his right hand still continued pressing on his walking-stick, his weight on one foot, his other heel raised, his eyes wide open towards the blackness of the cutting. The only movement in him was a slight dropping of the lower jaw, separating his previously closed lips a little way, as when a strange conviction rushes home suddenly upon a man. A new surprise, not nearly so trivial as the first, had taken possession of him.

It was on this account. At one of the illuminated windows of a second-class carriage in the series gone by, he had seen a pale face, reclining upon one hand, the light from the lamp falling full upon it. The face was a woman's.

At last Manston moved; gave a whispering kind of whistle, adjusted his hat, and walked on again, cross-questioning himself in every direction as to how a piece of knowledge he had carefully concealed had found its way to another person's intelligence. 'How can my address have become known?' he said at length, audibly. 'Well, it is a blessing I have been circumspect and honourable, in relation to that--yes, I will say it, for once, even if the words choke me, that darling of mine, Cytherea, never



to be my own, never. I suppose all will come out now. All!' The great sadness of his utterance proved that no mean force had been exercised upon himself to sustain the circumspection he had just claimed.

He wheeled to the left, pursued the ditch beside the railway fence, and presently emerged from the wood, stepping into a road which crossed the railway by a bridge.

As he neared home, the anxiety lately written in his face, merged by degrees into a grimly humorous smile, which hung long upon his lips, and he quoted aloud a line from the book of Jeremiah--

'A woman shall compass a man.'

### 3. NOVEMBER THE NINETEENTH. DAYBREAK

Before it was light the next morning, two little naked feet pattered along the passage in Knapwater House, from which Owen Graye's bedroom opened, and a tap was given upon his door.

'Owen, Owen, are you awake?' said Cytherea in a whisper through the keyhole. 'You must get up directly, or you'll miss the train.'

When he descended to his sister's little room, he found her there already waiting with a cup of cocoa and a grilled rasher on the table for him. A hasty meal was despatched in the intervals of putting on his

overcoat and finding his hat, and they then went softly through the long deserted passages, the kitchen-maid who had prepared their breakfast walking before them with a lamp held high above her head, which cast long wheeling shadows down corridors intersecting the one they followed, their remoter ends being lost in darkness. The door was unbolted and they stepped out.

Owen had preferred walking to the station to accepting the pony-carriage which Miss Aldclyffe had placed at his disposal, having a morbid horror of giving trouble to people richer than himself, and especially to their men-servants, who looked down upon him as a hybrid monster in social position. Cytherea proposed to walk a little way with him.

'I want to talk to you as long as I can,' she said tenderly.

Brother and sister then emerged by the heavy door into the drive. The feeling and aspect of the hour were precisely similar to those under which the steward had left the house the evening previous, excepting that apparently unearthly reversal of natural sequence, which is caused by the world getting lighter instead of darker. 'The tearful glimmer of the languid dawn' was just sufficient to reveal to them the melancholy red leaves, lying thickly in the channels by the roadside, ever and anon loudly tapped on by heavy drops of water, which the boughs above had collected from the foggy air.

They passed the Old House, engaged in a deep conversation, and had

proceeded about twenty yards by a cross route, in the direction of the turnpike road, when the form of a woman emerged from the porch of the building.

She was wrapped in a grey waterproof cloak, the hood of which was drawn over her head and closely round her face--so closely that her eyes were the sole features uncovered.

With this one exception of her appearance there, the most perfect stillness and silence pervaded the steward's residence from basement to chimney. Not a shutter was open; not a twine of smoke came forth.

Underneath the ivy-covered gateway she stood still and listened for two, or possibly three minutes, till she became conscious of others in the park. Seeing the pair she stepped back, with the apparent intention of letting them pass out of sight, and evidently wishing to avoid observation. But looking at her watch, and returning it rapidly to her pocket, as if surprised at the lateness of the hour, she hurried out again, and across the park by a still more oblique line than that traced by Owen and his sister.

These in the meantime had got into the road, and were walking along it as the woman came up on the other side of the boundary hedge, looking for a gate or stile, by which she, too, might get off the grass upon the hard ground.

Their conversation, of which every word was clear and distinct, in the still air of the dawn, to the distance of a quarter of a mile, reached her ears, and withdrew her attention from all other matters and sights whatsoever. Thus arrested she stood for an instant as precisely in the attitude of Imogen by the cave of Belarius, as if she had studied the position from the play. When they had advanced a few steps, she followed them in some doubt, still screened by the hedge.

'Do you believe in such odd coincidences?' said Cytherea.

'How do you mean, believe in them? They occur sometimes.'

'Yes, one will occur often enough--that is, two disconnected events will fall strangely together by chance, and people scarcely notice the fact beyond saying, "Oddly enough it happened that so and so were the same," and so on. But when three such events coincide without any apparent reason for the coincidence, it seems as if there must be invisible means at work. You see, three things falling together in that manner are ten times as singular as two cases of coincidence which are distinct.'

'Well, of course: what a mathematical head you have, Cytherea! But I don't see so much to marvel at in our case. That the man who kept the public-house in which Miss Aldclyffe fainted, and who found out her name and position, lives in this neighbourhood, is accounted for by the fact that she got him the berth to stop his tongue. That you came here was simply owing to Springrove.'

'Ah, but look at this. Miss Aldclyffe is the woman our father first loved, and I have come to Miss Aldclyffe's; you can't get over that.'

From these premises, she proceeded to argue like an elderly divine on the designs of Providence which were apparent in such conjunctures, and went into a variety of details connected with Miss Aldclyffe's history.

'Had I better tell Miss Aldclyffe that I know all this?' she inquired at last.

'What's the use?' he said. 'Your possessing the knowledge does no harm; you are at any rate comfortable here, and a confession to Miss Aldclyffe might only irritate her. No, hold your tongue, Cytherea.'

'I fancy I should have been tempted to tell her too,' Cytherea went on, 'had I not found out that there exists a very odd, almost imperceptible, and yet real connection of some kind between her and Mr. Manston, which is more than that of a mutual interest in the estate.'

'She is in love with him!' exclaimed Owen; 'fancy that!'

'Ah--that's what everybody says who has been keen enough to notice anything. I said so at first. And yet now I cannot persuade myself that she is in love with him at all.'

'Why can't you?'

'She doesn't act as if she were. She isn't--you will know I don't say it from any vanity, Owen--she isn't the least jealous of me.'

'Perhaps she is in some way in his power.'

'No--she is not. He was openly advertised for, and chosen from forty or fifty who answered the advertisement, without knowing whose it was. And since he has been here, she has certainly done nothing to compromise herself in any way. Besides, why should she have brought an enemy here at all?'

'Then she must have fallen in love with him. You know as well as I do, Cyth, that with women there's nothing between the two poles of emotion towards an interesting male acquaintance. 'Tis either love or aversion.'

They walked for a few minutes in silence, when Cytherea's eyes accidentally fell upon her brother's feet.

'Owen,' she said, 'do you know that there is something unusual in your manner of walking?'

'What is it like?' he asked.

'I can't quite say, except that you don't walk so regularly as you used

to.'

The woman behind the hedge, who had still continued to dog their footsteps, made an impatient movement at this change in their conversation, and looked at her watch again. Yet she seemed reluctant to give over listening to them.

'Yes,' Owen returned with assumed carelessness, 'I do know it. I think the cause of it is that mysterious pain which comes just above my ankle sometimes. You remember the first time I had it? That day we went by steam-packet to Lulstead Cove, when it hindered me from coming back to you, and compelled me to sleep with the gateman we have been talking about.'

'But is it anything serious, dear Owen?' Cytherea exclaimed, with some alarm.

'O, nothing at all. It is sure to go off again. I never find a sign of it when I sit in the office.'

Again their unperceived companion made a gesture of vexation, and looked at her watch as if time were precious. But the dialogue still flowed on upon this new subject, and showed no sign of returning to its old channel.

Gathering up her skirt decisively she renounced all further hope, and

hurried along the ditch till she had dropped into a valley, and came to a gate which was beyond the view of those coming behind. This she softly opened, and came out upon the road, following it in the direction of the railway station.

Presently she heard Owen Graye's footsteps in her rear, his quickened pace implying that he had parted from his sister. The woman thereupon increased her rapid walk to a run, and in a few minutes safely distanced her fellow-traveller.

The railway at Carriford Road consisted only of a single line of rails; and the short local down-train by which Owen was going to Budmouth was shunted on to a siding whilst the first up-train passed. Graye entered the waiting-room, and the door being open he listlessly observed the movements of a woman wearing a long grey cloak, and closely hooded, who had asked for a ticket for London.

He followed her with his eyes on to the platform, saw her waiting there and afterwards stepping into the train: his recollection of her ceasing with the perception.

#### 4. EIGHT TO TEN O'CLOCK A.M.

Mrs. Crickett, twice a widow, and now the parish clerk's wife, a fine-framed, scandal-loving woman, with a peculiar corner to her eye by which, without turning her head, she could see what people were doing



almost behind her, lived in a cottage standing nearer to the old manor-house than any other in the village of Carriford, and she had on that account been temporarily engaged by the steward, as a respectable kind of charwoman and general servant, until a settled arrangement could be made with some person as permanent domestic.

Every morning, therefore, Mrs. Crickett, immediately she had lighted the fire in her own cottage, and prepared the breakfast for herself and husband, paced her way to the Old House to do the same for Mr. Manston. Then she went home to breakfast; and when the steward had eaten his, and had gone out on his rounds, she returned again to clear away, make his bed, and put the house in order for the day.

On the morning of Owen Graye's departure, she went through the operations of her first visit as usual--proceeded home to breakfast, and went back again, to perform those of the second.

Entering Manston's empty bedroom, with her hands on her hips, she indifferently cast her eyes upon the bed, previously to dismantling it.

Whilst she looked, she thought in an inattentive manner, 'What a remarkably quiet sleeper Mr. Manston must be!' The upper bed-clothes were flung back, certainly, but the bed was scarcely disarranged. 'Anybody would almost fancy,' she thought, 'that he had made it himself after rising.'

But these evanescent thoughts vanished as they had come, and Mrs. Crickett set to work; she dragged off the counterpane, blankets and sheets, and stooped to lift the pillows. Thus stooping, something arrested her attention; she looked closely--more closely--very closely. 'Well, to be sure!' was all she could say. The clerk's wife stood as if the air had suddenly set to amber, and held her fixed like a fly in it.

The object of her wonder was a trailing brown hair, very little less than a yard long, which proved it clearly to be a hair from some woman's head. She drew it off the pillow, and took it to the window; there holding it out she looked fixedly at it, and became utterly lost in meditation: her gaze, which had at first actively settled on the hair, involuntarily dropped past its object by degrees and was lost on the floor, as the inner vision obscured the outer one.

She at length moistened her lips, returned her eyes to the hair, wound it round her fingers, put it in some paper, and secreted the whole in her pocket. Mrs. Crickett's thoughts were with her work no more that morning.

She searched the house from roof-tree to cellar, for some other trace of feminine existence or appurtenance; but none was to be found.

She went out into the yard, coal-hole, stable, hay-loft, green-house, fowl-house, and piggery, and still there was no sign. Coming in again, she saw a bonnet, eagerly pounced upon it; and found it to be her own.

Hastily completing her arrangements in the other rooms, she entered the village again, and called at once on the postmistress, Elizabeth Leat, an intimate friend of hers, and a female who sported several unique diseases and afflictions.

Mrs. Crickett unfolded the paper, took out the hair, and waved it on high before the perplexed eyes of Elizabeth, which immediately mooned and wandered after it like a cat's.

'What is it?' said Mrs. Leat, contracting her eyelids, and stretching out towards the invisible object a narrow bony hand that would have been an unmitigated delight to the pencil of Carlo Crivelli.

'You shall hear,' said Mrs. Crickett, complacently gathering up the treasure into her own fat hand; and the secret was then solemnly imparted, together with the accident of its discovery.

A shaving-glass was taken down from a nail, laid on its back in the middle of a table by the window, and the hair spread carefully out upon it. The pair then bent over the table from opposite sides, their elbows on the edge, their hands supporting their heads, their foreheads nearly touching, and their eyes upon the hair.

'He ha' been mad a'ter my lady Cytherea,' said Mrs. Crickett, 'and 'tis my very belief the hair is--'

'No 'tidn'. Hers idn' so dark as that,' said Elizabeth.

'Elizabeth, you know that as the faithful wife of a servant of the Church, I should be glad to think as you do about the girl. Mind I don't wish to say anything against Miss Graye, but this I do say, that I believe her to be a nameless thing, and she's no right to stick a moral clock in her face, and deceive the country in such a way. If she wasn't of a bad stock at the outset she was bad in the planten, and if she wasn't bad in the planten, she was bad in the growen, and if not in the growen, she's made bad by what she's gone through since.'

'But I have another reason for knowing it idn' hers,' said Mrs. Leat.

'Ah! I know whose it is then--Miss Aldclyffe's, upon my song!'

'Tis the colour of hers, but I don't believe it to be hers either.'

'Don't you believe what they d' say about her and him?'

'I say nothen about that; but you don't know what I know about his letters.'

'What about 'em?'

'He d' post all his letters here except those for one person, and they

he d' take to Budmouth. My son is in Budmouth Post Office, as you know, and as he d' sit at desk he can see over the blind of the window all the people who d' post letters. Mr. Manston d' unvariably go there wi' letters for that person; my boy d' know 'em by sight well enough now.'

'Is it a she?'

"'Tis a she.'

'What's her name?'

'The little stunpoll of a fellow couldn't call to mind more than that 'tis Miss Somebody, of London. However, that's the woman who ha' been here, depend upon't--a wicked one--some poor street-wench escaped from Sodom, I warrant ye.'

'Only to find herself in Gomorrah, seemingly.'

'That may be.'

'No, no, Mrs. Leat, this is clear to me. 'Tis no miss who came here to see our steward last night--whenever she came or wherever she vanished. Do you think he would ha' let a miss get here how she could, go away how she would, without breakfast or help of any kind?'

Elizabeth shook her head--Mrs. Crickett looked at her solemnly.

'I say I know she had no help of any kind; I know it was so, for the grate was quite cold when I touched it this morning with these fingers, and he was still in bed. No, he wouldn't take the trouble to write letters to a girl and then treat her so off-hand as that. There's a tie between 'em stronger than feelen. She's his wife.'

'He married! The Lord so 's, what shall we hear next? Do he look married now? His are not the abashed eyes and lips of a married man.'

'Perhaps she's a tame one--but she's his wife still.'

'No, no: he's not a married man.'

'Yes, yes, he is. I've had three, and I ought to know.'

'Well, well,' said Mrs. Leat, giving way. 'Whatever may be the truth on't I trust Providence will settle it all for the best, as He always do.'

'Ay, ay, Elizabeth,' rejoined Mrs. Crickett with a satirical sigh, as she turned on her foot to go home, 'good people like you may say so, but I have always found Providence a different sort of feller.'

5. NOVEMBER THE TWENTIETH

It was Miss Aldclyffe's custom, a custom originated by her father, and nourished by her own exclusiveness, to unlock the post-bag herself every morning, instead of allowing the duty to devolve on the butler, as was the case in most of the neighbouring county families. The bag was brought upstairs each morning to her dressing-room, where she took out the contents, mostly in the presence of her maid and Cytherea, who had the entree of the chamber at all hours, and attended there in the morning at a kind of reception on a small scale, which was held by Miss Aldclyffe of her namesake only.

Here she read her letters before the glass, whilst undergoing the operation of being brushed and dressed.

'What woman can this be, I wonder?' she said on the morning succeeding that of the last section. "'London, N.!' It is the first time in my life I ever had a letter from that outlandish place, the North side of London.'

Cytherea had just come into her presence to learn if there was anything for herself; and on being thus addressed, walked up to Miss Aldclyffe's corner of the room to look at the curiosity which had raised such an exclamation. But the lady, having opened the envelope and read a few lines, put it quickly in her pocket, before Cytherea could reach her side.

'O, 'tis nothing,' she said. She proceeded to make general remarks in

a noticeably forced tone of sang-froid, from which she soon lapsed into silence. Not another word was said about the letter: she seemed very anxious to get her dressing done, and the room cleared. Thereupon Cytherea went away to the other window, and a few minutes later left the room to follow her own pursuits.

It was late when Miss Aldclyffe descended to the breakfast-table and then she seemed there to no purpose; tea, coffee, eggs, cutlets, and all their accessories, were left absolutely untasted. The next that was seen of her was when walking up and down the south terrace, and round the flower-beds; her face was pale, and her tread was fitful, and she crumpled a letter in her hand.

Dinner-time came round as usual; she did not speak ten words, or indeed seem conscious of the meal; for all that Miss Aldclyffe did in the way of eating, dinner might have been taken out as intact as it was taken in.

In her own private apartment Miss Aldclyffe again pulled out the letter of the morning. One passage in it ran thus:--

'Of course, being his wife, I could publish the fact, and compel him to acknowledge me at any moment, notwithstanding his threats, and reasonings that it will be better to wait. I have waited, and waited again, and the time for such acknowledgment seems no nearer than at



first. To show you how patiently I have waited I can tell you that not till a fortnight ago, when by stress of circumstances I had been driven to new lodgings, have I ever assumed my married name, solely on account of its having been his request all along that I should not do it. This writing to you, madam, is my first disobedience, and I am justified in it. A woman who is driven to visit her husband like a thief in the night and then sent away like a street dog--left to get up, unbolt, unbar, and find her way out of the house as she best may--is justified in doing anything.

'But should I demand of him a restitution of rights, there would be involved a publicity which I could not endure, and a noisy scandal flinging my name the length and breadth of the country.

'What I still prefer to any such violent means is that you reason with him privately, and compel him to bring me home to your parish in a decent and careful manner, in the way that would be adopted by any respectable man, whose wife had been living away from him for some time, by reason, say, of peculiar family circumstances which had caused disunion, but not enmity, and who at length was enabled to reinstate her in his house.

'You will, I know, oblige me in this, especially as knowledge of a peculiar transaction of your own, which took place some years ago, has lately come to me in a singular way. I will not at present trouble you by describing how. It is enough, that I alone, of all people living,

know all the sides of the story, those from whom I collected it having each only a partial knowledge which confuses them and points to nothing. One person knows of your early engagement and its sudden termination; another, of the reason of those strange meetings at inns and coffee-houses; another, of what was sufficient to cause all this, and so on. I know what fits one and all the circumstances like a key, and shows them to be the natural outcrop of a rational (though rather rash) line of conduct for a young lady. You will at once perceive how it was that some at least of these things were revealed to me.

'This knowledge then, common to, and secretly treasured by us both, is the ground upon which I beg for your friendship and help, with a feeling that you will be too generous to refuse it to me.

'I may add that, as yet, my husband knows nothing of this, neither need he if you remember my request.'

'A threat--a flat stinging threat! as delicately wrapped up in words as the woman could do it; a threat from a miserable unknown creature to an Aldclyffe, and not the least proud member of the family either! A threat on his account--O, O! shall it be?'

Presently this humour of defiance vanished, and the members of her body became supple again, her proceedings proving that it was absolutely necessary to give way, Aldclyffe as she was. She wrote a short answer

to Mrs. Manston, saying civilly that Mr. Manston's possession of such a near relation was a fact quite new to herself, and that she would see what could be done in such an unfortunate affair.

#### 6. NOVEMBER THE TWENTY-FIRST

Manston received a message the next day requesting his attendance at the House punctually at eight o'clock the ensuing evening. Miss Aldclyffe was brave and imperious, but with the purpose she had in view she could not look him in the face whilst daylight shone upon her.

The steward was shown into the library. On entering it, he was immediately struck with the unusual gloom which pervaded the apartment. The fire was dead and dull, one lamp, and that a comparatively small one, was burning at the extreme end, leaving the main proportion of the lofty and sombre room in an artificial twilight, scarcely powerful enough to render visible the titles of the folio and quarto volumes which were jammed into the lower tiers of the bookshelves.

After keeping him waiting for more than twenty minutes (Miss Aldclyffe knew that excellent recipe for taking the stiffness out of human flesh, and for extracting all pre-arrangement from human speech) she entered the room.

Manston sought her eye directly. The hue of her features was not discernible, but the calm glance she flung at him, from which all

attempt at returning his scrutiny was absent, awoke him to the perception that probably his secret was by some means or other known to her; how it had become known he could not tell.

She drew forth the letter, unfolded it, and held it up to him, letting it hang by one corner from between her finger and thumb, so that the light from the lamp, though remote, fell directly upon its surface.

'You know whose writing this is?' she said.

He saw the strokes plainly, instantly resolving to burn his ships and hazard all on an advance.

'My wife's,' he said calmly.

His quiet answer threw her off her balance. She had no more expected an answer than does a preacher when he exclaims from the pulpit, 'Do you feel your sin?' She had clearly expected a sudden alarm.

'And why all this concealment?' she said again, her voice rising, as she vainly endeavoured to control her feelings, whatever they were.

'It doesn't follow that, because a man is married, he must tell every stranger of it, madam,' he answered, just as calmly as before.

'Stranger! well, perhaps not; but, Mr. Manston, why did you choose to

conceal it, I ask again? I have a perfect right to ask this question, as you will perceive, if you consider the terms of my advertisement.'

'I will tell you. There were two simple reasons. The first was this practical one; you advertised for an unmarried man, if you remember?'

'Of course I remember.'

'Well, an incident suggested to me that I should try for the situation. I was married; but, knowing that in getting an office where there is a restriction of this kind, leaving one's wife behind is always accepted as a fulfilment of the condition, I left her behind for awhile. The other reason is, that these terms of yours afforded me a plausible excuse for escaping (for a short time) the company of a woman I had been mistaken in marrying.'

'Mistaken! what was she?' the lady inquired.

'A third-rate actress, whom I met with during my stay in Liverpool last summer, where I had gone to fulfil a short engagement with an architect.'

'Where did she come from?'

'She is an American by birth, and I grew to dislike her when we had been married a week.'

'She was ugly, I imagine?'

'She is not an ugly woman by any means.'

'Up to the ordinary standard?'

'Quite up to the ordinary standard--indeed, handsome. After a while we quarrelled and separated.'

'You did not ill-use her, of course?' said Miss Aldclyffe, with a little sarcasm.

'I did not.'

'But at any rate, you got thoroughly tired of her.'

Manston looked as if he began to think her questions out of place; however, he said quietly, 'I did get tired of her. I never told her so, but we separated; I to come here, bringing her with me as far as London and leaving her there in perfectly comfortable quarters; and though your advertisement expressed a single man, I have always intended to tell you the whole truth; and this was when I was going to tell it, when your satisfaction with my careful management of your affairs should have proved the risk to be a safe one to run.'

She bowed.

'Then I saw that you were good enough to be interested in my welfare to a greater extent than I could have anticipated or hoped, judging you by the frigidity of other employers, and this caused me to hesitate. I was vexed at the complication of affairs. So matters stood till three nights ago; I was then walking home from the pottery, and came up to the railway. The down-train came along close to me, and there, sitting at a carriage window, I saw my wife: she had found out my address, and had thereupon determined to follow me here. I had not been home many minutes before she came in, next morning early she left again--'

'Because you treated her so cavalierly?'

'And as I suppose, wrote to you directly. That's the whole story of her, madam.' Whatever were Manston's real feelings towards the lady who had received his explanation in these supercilious tones, they remained locked within him as within a casket of steel.

'Did your friends know of your marriage, Mr. Manston?' she continued.

'Nobody at all; we kept it a secret for various reasons.'

'It is true then that, as your wife tells me in this letter, she has not passed as Mrs. Manston till within these last few days?'

'It is quite true; I was in receipt of a very small and uncertain income when we married; and so she continued playing at the theatre as before our marriage, and in her maiden name.'

'Has she any friends?'

'I have never heard that she has any in England. She came over here on some theatrical speculation, as one of a company who were going to do much, but who never did anything; and here she has remained.'

A pause ensued, which was terminated by Miss Aldclyffe.

'I understand,' she said. 'Now, though I have no direct right to concern myself with your private affairs (beyond those which arise from your misleading me and getting the office you hold)--'

'As to that, madam,' he interrupted, rather hotly, 'as to coming here, I am vexed as much as you. Somebody, a member of the Institute of Architects--who, I could never tell--sent to my old address in London your advertisement cut from the paper; it was forwarded to me; I wanted to get away from Liverpool, and it seemed as if this was put in my way on purpose, by some old friend or other. I answered the advertisement certainly, but I was not particularly anxious to come here, nor am I anxious to stay.'

Miss Aldclyffe descended from haughty superiority to womanly persuasion



with a haste which was almost ludicrous. Indeed, the Quos ego of the whole lecture had been less the genuine menace of the imperious ruler of Knapwater than an artificial utterance to hide a failing heart.

'Now, now, Mr. Manston, you wrong me; don't suppose I wish to be overbearing, or anything of the kind; and you will allow me to say this much, at any rate, that I have become interested in your wife, as well as in yourself.'

'Certainly, madam,' he said, slowly, like a man feeling his way in the dark. Manston was utterly at fault now. His previous experience of the effect of his form and features upon womankind en masse, had taught him to flatter himself that he could account by the same law of natural selection for the extraordinary interest Miss Aldclyffe had hitherto taken in him, as an unmarried man; an interest he did not at all object to, seeing that it kept him near Cytherea, and enabled him, a man of no wealth, to rule on the estate as if he were its lawful owner. Like Curius at his Sabine farm, he had counted it his glory not to possess gold himself, but to have power over her who did. But at this hint of the lady's wish to take his wife under her wing also, he was perplexed: could she have any sinister motive in doing so? But he did not allow himself to be troubled with these doubts, which only concerned his wife's happiness.

'She tells me,' continued Miss Aldclyffe, 'how utterly alone in the world she stands, and that is an additional reason why I should

sympathize with her. Instead, then, of requesting the favour of your retirement from the post, and dismissing your interests altogether, I will retain you as my steward still, on condition that you bring home your wife, and live with her respectably, in short, as if you loved her; you understand. I wish you to stay here if you grant that everything shall flow smoothly between yourself and her.'

The breast and shoulders of the steward rose, as if an expression of defiance was about to be poured forth; before it took form, he controlled himself and said, in his natural voice--

'My part of the performance shall be carried out, madam.'

'And her anxiety to obtain a standing in the world ensures that hers will,' replied Miss Aldclyffe. 'That will be satisfactory, then.'

After a few additional remarks, she gently signified that she wished to put an end to the interview. The steward took the hint and retired.

He felt vexed and mortified; yet in walking homeward he was convinced that telling the whole truth as he had done, with the single exception of his love for Cytherea (which he tried to hide even from himself), had never served him in better stead than it had done that night.

Manston went to his desk and thought of Cytherea's beauty with the bitterest, wildest regret. After the lapse of a few minutes he calmed

himself by a stoical effort, and wrote the subjoined letter to his wife:--

'KNAPWATER,  
November 21, 1864.

'DEAR EUNICE,--I hope you reached London safely after your flighty visit to me.

'As I promised, I have thought over our conversation that night, and your wish that your coming here should be no longer delayed. After all, it was perfectly natural that you should have spoken unkindly as you did, ignorant as you were of the circumstances which bound me.

'So I have made arrangements to fetch you home at once. It is hardly worth while for you to attempt to bring with you any luggage you may have gathered about you (beyond mere clothing). Dispose of superfluous things at a broker's; your bringing them would only make a talk in this parish, and lead people to believe we had long been keeping house separately.

'Will next Monday suit you for coming? You have nothing to do that can occupy you for more than a day or two, as far as I can see, and the remainder of this week will afford ample time. I can be in London the night before, and we will come down together by the mid-day train--Your

very affectionate husband,

'AENEAS MANSTON.

'Now, of course, I shall no longer write to you as Mrs. Rondley.'

The address on the envelope was--

MRS. MANSTON, 41 CHARLES SQUARE,  
HOXTON,  
LONDON, N.

He took the letter to the house, and it being too late for the country post, sent one of the stablemen with it to Casterbridge, instead of troubling to go to Budmouth with it himself as heretofore. He had no longer any necessity to keep his condition a secret.

#### 7. FROM THE TWENTY-SECOND TO THE TWENTY-SEVENTH OF NOVEMBER

But the next morning Manston found that he had been forgetful of another matter, in naming the following Monday to his wife for the journey.

The fact was this. A letter had just come, reminding him that he had left the whole of the succeeding week open for an important business

engagement with a neighbouring land-agent, at that gentleman's residence thirteen miles off. The particular day he had suggested to his wife, had, in the interim, been appropriated by his correspondent. The meeting could not now be put off.

So he wrote again to his wife, stating that business, which could not be postponed, called him away from home on Monday, and would entirely prevent him coming all the way to fetch her on Sunday night as he had intended, but that he would meet her at the Carriford Road Station with a conveyance when she arrived there in the evening.

The next day came his wife's answer to his first letter, in which she said that she would be ready to be fetched at the time named. Having already written his second letter, which was by that time in her hands, he made no further reply.

The week passed away. The steward had, in the meantime, let it become generally known in the village that he was a married man, and by a little judicious management, sound family reasons for his past secrecy upon the subject, which were floated as adjuncts to the story, were placidly received; they seemed so natural and justifiable to the unsophisticated minds of nine-tenths of his neighbours, that curiosity in the matter, beyond a strong curiosity to see the lady's face, was well-nigh extinguished.