'No: have it altered, of course,' said Miss Aldclyffe cheerfully. 'There's nothing bad in Friday, but such a creature as you will be thinking about its being unlucky--in fact, I wouldn't choose a Friday myself to be married on, since all the other days are equally available.'

'I shall not have it altered,' said Cytherea firmly; 'it has been altered once already: I shall let it be.'

XIII. THE EVENTS OF ONE DAY

1. THE FIFTH OF JANUARY. BEFORE DAWN

We pass over the intervening weeks. The time of the story is thus advanced more than a quarter of a year.

On the midnight preceding the morning which would make her the wife of a man whose presence fascinated her into involuntariness of bearing, and whom in absence she almost dreaded, Cytherea lay in her little bed, vainly endeavouring to sleep.

She had been looking back amid the years of her short though varied

past, and thinking of the threshold upon which she stood. Days and months had dimmed the form of Edward Springrove like the gauzes of a vanishing stage-scene, but his dying voice could still be heard faintly behind. That a soft small chord in her still vibrated true to his memory, she would not admit: that she did not approach Manston with feelings which could by any stretch of words be called hymeneal, she calmly owned.

'Why do I marry him?' she said to herself. 'Because Owen, dear Owen my brother, wishes me to marry him. Because Mr. Manston is, and has been, uniformly kind to Owen, and to me. "Act in obedience to the dictates of common-sense," Owen said, "and dread the sharp sting of poverty. How many thousands of women like you marry every year for the same reason, to secure a home, and mere ordinary, material comforts, which after all go far to make life endurable, even if not supremely happy."

''Tis right, I suppose, for him to say that. O, if people only knew what a timidity and melancholy upon the subject of her future grows up in the heart of a friendless woman who is blown about like a reed shaken with the wind, as I am, they would not call this resignation of one's self by the name of scheming to get a husband. Scheme to marry? I'd rather scheme to die! I know I am not pleasing my heart; I know that if I only were concerned, I should like risking a single future. But why should I please my useless self overmuch, when by doing otherwise I please those who are more valuable than I?'

In the midst of desultory reflections like these, which alternated with surmises as to the inexplicable connection that appeared to exist between her intended husband and Miss Aldclyffe, she heard dull noises outside the walls of the house, which she could not quite fancy to be caused by the wind. She seemed doomed to such disturbances at critical periods of her existence. 'It is strange,' she pondered, 'that this my last night in Knapwater House should be disturbed precisely as my first was, no occurrence of the kind having intervened.'

As the minutes glided by the noise increased, sounding as if some one were beating the wall below her window with a bunch of switches. She would gladly have left her room and gone to stay with one of the maids, but they were without doubt all asleep.

The only person in the house likely to be awake, or who would have brains enough to comprehend her nervousness, was Miss Aldclyffe, but Cytherea never cared to go to Miss Aldclyffe's room, though she was always welcome there, and was often almost compelled to go against her will.

The oft-repeated noise of switches grew heavier upon the wall, and was now intermingled with creaks, and a rattling like the rattling of dice. The wind blew stronger; there came first a snapping, then a crash, and some portion of the mystery was revealed. It was the breaking off and fall of a branch from one of the large trees outside. The smacking against the wall, and the intermediate rattling, ceased from that time.

Well, it was the tree which had caused the noises. The unexplained matter was that neither of the trees ever touched the walls of the house during the highest wind, and that trees could not rattle like a man playing castanets or shaking dice.

She thought, 'Is it the intention of Fate that something connected with these noises shall influence my future as in the last case of the kind?'

During the dilemma she fell into a troubled sleep, and dreamt that she was being whipped with dry bones suspended on strings, which rattled at every blow like those of a malefactor on a gibbet; that she shifted and shrank and avoided every blow, and they fell then upon the wall to which she was tied. She could not see the face of the executioner for his mask, but his form was like Manston's.

'Thank Heaven!' she said, when she awoke and saw a faint light struggling through her blind. 'Now what were those noises?' To settle that question seemed more to her than the event of the day.

She pulled the blind aside and looked out. All was plain. The evening previous had closed in with a grey drizzle, borne upon a piercing air from the north, and now its effects were visible. The hoary drizzle still continued; but the trees and shrubs were laden with icicles to an extent such as she had never before witnessed. A shoot of the diameter of a pin's head was iced as thick as her finger; all the boughs in

the park were bent almost to the earth with the immense weight of the glistening incumbrance; the walks were like a looking-glass. Many boughs had snapped beneath their burden, and lay in heaps upon the icy grass. Opposite her eye, on the nearest tree, was a fresh yellow scar, showing where the branch that had terrified her had been splintered from the trunk.

'I never could have believed it possible,' she thought, surveying the bowed-down branches, 'that trees would bend so far out of their true positions without breaking.' By watching a twig she could see a drop collect upon it from the hoary fog, sink to the lowest point, and there become coagulated as the others had done.

'Or that I could so exactly have imitated them,' she continued. 'On this morning I am to be married--unless this is a scheme of the great Mother to hinder a union of which she does not approve. Is it possible for my wedding to take place in the face of such weather as this?'

2. MORNING

Her brother Owen was staying with Manston at the Old House. Contrary to the opinion of the doctors, the wound had healed after the first surgical operation, and his leg was gradually acquiring strength, though he could only as yet get about on crutches, or ride, or be dragged in a chair.

Miss Aldclyffe had arranged that Cytherea should be married from Knapwater House, and not from her brother's lodgings at Budmouth, which was Cytherea's first idea. Owen, too, seemed to prefer the plan. The capricious old maid had latterly taken to the contemplation of the wedding with even greater warmth than had at first inspired her, and appeared determined to do everything in her power, consistent with her dignity, to render the adjuncts of the ceremony pleasing and complete.

But the weather seemed in flat contradiction of the whole proceeding. At eight o'clock the coachman crept up to the House almost upon his hands and knees, entered the kitchen, and stood with his back to the fire, panting from his exertions in pedestrianism.

The kitchen was by far the pleasantest apartment in Knapwater House on such a morning as this. The vast fire was the centre of the whole system, like a sun, and threw its warm rays upon the figures of the domestics, wheeling about it in true planetary style. A nervously-feeble imitation of its flicker was continually attempted by a family of polished metallic utensils standing in rows and groups against the walls opposite, the whole collection of shines nearly annihilating the weak daylight from outside. A step further in, and the nostrils were greeted by the scent of green herbs just gathered, and the eye by the plump form of the cook, wholesome, white-aproned, and floury--looking as edible as the food she manipulated--her movements being supported and assisted by her satellites, the kitchen and scullery maids. Minute recurrent sounds prevailed--the click of the smoke-jack, the flap of the flames, and the

light touches of the women's slippers upon the stone floor.

The coachman hemmed, spread his feet more firmly upon the hearthstone, and looked hard at a small plate in the extreme corner of the dresser.

'No wedden this mornen--that's my opinion. In fact, there can't be,' he said abruptly, as if the words were the mere torso of a many-membered thought that had existed complete in his head.

The kitchen-maid was toasting a slice of bread at the end of a very long toasting-fork, which she held at arm's length towards the unapproachable fire, travestying the Flanconnade in fencing.

'Bad out of doors, isn't it?' she said, with a look of commiseration for things in general.

'Bad? Not even a liven soul, gentle or simple, can stand on level ground. As to getten up hill to the church, 'tis perfect lunacy. And I speak of foot-passengers. As to horses and carriage, 'tis murder to think of 'em. I am going to send straight as a line into the breakfast-room, and say 'tis a closer.... Hullo--here's Clerk Crickett and John Day a-comen! Now just look at 'em and picture a wedden if you can.'

All eyes were turned to the window, from which the clerk and gardener were seen crossing the court, bowed and stooping like Bel and Nebo.

'You'll have to go if it breaks all the horses' legs in the county,' said the cook, turning from the spectacle, knocking open the oven-door with the tongs, glancing critically in, and slamming it together with a clang.

'O, O; why shall I?' asked the coachman, including in his auditory by a glance the clerk and gardener who had just entered.

'Because Mr. Manston is in the business. Did you ever know him to give up for weather of any kind, or for any other mortal thing in heaven or earth?'

'----Mornen so's--such as it is!' interrupted Mr. Crickett cheerily, coming forward to the blaze and warming one hand without looking at the fire. 'Mr. Manston gie up for anything in heaven or earth, did you say? You might ha' cut it short by sayen "to Miss Aldclyffe," and leaven out heaven and earth as trifles. But it might be put off; putten off a thing isn't getten rid of a thing, if that thing is a woman. O no, no!'

The coachman and gardener now naturally subsided into secondaries. The cook went on rather sharply, as she dribbled milk into the exact centre of a little crater of flour in a platter--

'It might be in this case; she's so indifferent.'

'Dang my old sides! and so it might be. I have a bit of news--I thought there was something upon my tongue; but 'tis a secret; not a word, mind, not a word. Why, Miss Hinton took a holiday yesterday.'

'Yes?' inquired the cook, looking up with perplexed curiosity.

'D'ye think that's all?'

'Don't be so three-cunning--if it is all, deliver you from the evil of raising a woman's expectations wrongfully; I'll skimmer your pate as sure as you cry Amen!'

'Well, it isn't all. When I got home last night my wife said, "Miss Adelaide took a holiday this mornen," says she (my wife, that is); "walked over to Nether Mynton, met the comen man, and got married!" says she.'

'Got married! what, Lord-a-mercy, did Springrove come?'

'Springrove, no--no--Springrove's nothen to do wi' it--'twas Farmer Bollens. They've been playing bo-peep for these two or three months seemingly. Whilst Master Teddy Springrove has been daddlen, and hawken, and spetten about having her, she's quietly left him all forsook. Serve him right. I don't blame the little woman a bit.'

'Farmer Bollens is old enough to be her father!'

'Ay, quite; and rich enough to be ten fathers. They say he's so rich that he has business in every bank, and measures his money in half-pint cups.'

'Lord, I wish it was me, don't I wish 'twas me!' said the scullery-maid.

'Yes, 'twas as neat a bit of stitching as ever I heard of,' continued the clerk, with a fixed eye, as if he were watching the process from a distance. 'Not a soul knew anything about it, and my wife is the only one in our parish who knows it yet. Miss Hinton came back from the wedden, went to Mr. Manston, puffed herself out large, and said she was Mrs. Bollens, but that if he wished, she had no objection to keep on the house till the regular time of giving notice had expired, or till he could get another tenant.'

'Just like her independence,' said the cook.

'Well, independent or no, she's Mrs. Bollens now. Ah, I shall never forget once when I went by Farmer Bollens's garden--years ago now--years, when he was taking up ashleaf taties. A merry feller I was at that time, a very merry feller--for 'twas before I took holy orders, and it didn't prick my conscience as 'twould now. "Farmer," says I, "little taties seem to turn out small this year, don't em?" "O no, Crickett," says he, "some be fair-sized." He's a dull man--Farmer Bollens is--he always was. However, that's neither here nor there; he's

a-married to a sharp woman, and if I don't make a mistake she'll bring him a pretty good family, gie her time.'

'Well, it don't matter; there's a Providence in it,' said the scullery-maid. 'God A'mighty always sends bread as well as children.'

'But 'tis the bread to one house and the children to another very often. However, I think I can see my lady Hinton's reason for chosen yesterday to sickness-or-health-it. Your young miss, and that one, had crossed one another's path in regard to young Master Springrove; and I expect that when Addy Hinton found Miss Graye wasn't caren to have en, she thought she'd be beforehand with her old enemy in marrying somebody else too. That's maids' logic all over, and maids' malice likewise.'

Women who are bad enough to divide against themselves under a man's partiality are good enough to instantly unite in a common cause against his attack. 'I'll just tell you one thing then,' said the cook, shaking out her words to the time of a whisk she was beating eggs with. 'Whatever maids' logic is and maids' malice too, if Cytherea Graye even now knows that young Springrove is free again, she'll fling over the steward as soon as look at him.'

'No, no: not now,' the coachman broke in like a moderator. 'There's honour in that maid, if ever there was in one. No Miss Hinton's tricks in her. She'll stick to Manston.'

'Pifh!'

'Don't let a word be said till the wedden is over, for Heaven's sake,' the clerk continued. 'Miss Aldclyffe would fairly hang and quarter me, if my news broke off that there wedden at a last minute like this.'

'Then you had better get your wife to bolt you in the closet for an hour or two, for you'll chatter it yourself to the whole boiling parish if she don't! 'Tis a poor womanly feller!'

'You shouldn't ha' begun it, clerk. I knew how 'twould be,' said the gardener soothingly, in a whisper to the clerk's mangled remains.

The clerk turned and smiled at the fire, and warmed his other hand.

3. NOON

The weather gave way. In half-an-hour there began a rapid thaw. By ten o'clock the roads, though still dangerous, were practicable to the extent of the half-mile required by the people of Knapwater Park. One mass of heavy leaden cloud spread over the whole sky; the air began to feel damp and mild out of doors, though still cold and frosty within.

They reached the church and passed up the nave, the deep-coloured glass of the narrow windows rendering the gloom of the morning almost night itself inside the building. Then the ceremony began. The only warmth

or spirit imported into it came from the bridegroom, who retained a vigorous--even Spenserian--bridal-mood throughout the morning.

Cytherea was as firm as he at this critical moment, but as cold as the air surrounding her. The few persons forming the wedding-party were constrained in movement and tone, and from the nave of the church came occasional coughs, emitted by those who, in spite of the weather, had assembled to see the termination of Cytherea's existence as a single woman. Many poor people loved her. They pitied her success, why, they could not tell, except that it was because she seemed to stand more like a statue than Cytherea Graye.

Yet she was prettily and carefully dressed; a strange contradiction in a man's idea of things--a saddening, perplexing contradiction. Are there any points in which a difference of sex amounts to a difference of nature? Then this is surely one. Not so much, as it is commonly put, in regard to the amount of consideration given, but in the conception of the thing considered. A man emasculated by coxcombry may spend more time upon the arrangement of his clothes than any woman, but even then there is no fetichism in his idea of them--they are still only a covering he uses for a time. But here was Cytherea, in the bottom of her heart almost indifferent to life, yet possessing an instinct with which her heart had nothing to do, the instinct to be particularly regardful of those sorry trifles, her robe, her flowers, her veil, and her gloves.

The irrevocable words were soon spoken--the indelible writing soon written--and they came out of the vestry. Candles had been necessary here to enable them to sign their names, and on their return to the church the light from the candles streamed from the small open door, and across the chancel to a black chestnut screen on the south side, dividing it from a small chapel or chantry, erected for the soul's peace of some Aldclyffe of the past. Through the open-work of this screen could now be seen illuminated, inside the chantry, the reclining figures of cross-legged knights, damp and green with age, and above them a huge classic monument, also inscribed to the Aldclyffe family, heavily sculptured in cadaverous marble.

Leaning here--almost hanging to the monument--was Edward Springrove, or his spirit.

The weak daylight would never have revealed him, shaded as he was by the screen; but the unexpected rays of candle-light in the front showed him forth in startling relief to any and all of those whose eyes wandered in that direction. The sight was a sad one--sad beyond all description. His eyes were wild, their orbits leaden. His face was of a sickly paleness, his hair dry and disordered, his lips parted as if he could get no breath. His figure was spectre-thin. His actions seemed beyond his own control.

Manston did not see him; Cytherea did. The healing effect upon her heart of a year's silence--a year and a half's separation--was undone in

an instant. One of those strange revivals of passion by mere sight--commoner in women than in men, and in oppressed women commonest of all--had taken place in her--so transcendently, that even to herself it seemed more like a new creation than a revival.

Marrying for a home--what a mockery it was!

It may be said that the means most potent for rekindling old love in a maiden's heart are, to see her lover in laughter and good spirits in her despite when the breach has been owing to a slight from herself; when owing to a slight from him, to see him suffering for his own fault. If he is happy in a clear conscience, she blames him; if he is miserable because deeply to blame, she blames herself. The latter was Cytherea's case now.

First, an agony of face told of the suppressed misery within her, which presently could be suppressed no longer. When they were coming out of the porch, there broke from her in a low plaintive scream the words, 'He's dying--dying! O God, save us!' She began to sink down, and would have fallen had not Manston caught her. The chief bridesmaid applied her vinaigrette.

'What did she say?' inquired Manston.

Owen was the only one to whom the words were intelligible, and he was

far too deeply impressed, or rather alarmed, to reply. She did not faint, and soon began to recover her self-command. Owen took advantage of the hindrance to step back to where the apparition had been seen. He was enraged with Springrove for what he considered an unwarrantable intrusion.

But Edward was not in the chantry. As he had come, so he had gone, nobody could tell how or whither.

4. AFTERNOON

It might almost have been believed that a transmutation had taken place in Cytherea's idiosyncrasy, that her moral nature had fled.

The wedding-party returned to the house. As soon as he could find an opportunity, Owen took his sister aside to speak privately with her on what had happened. The expression of her face was hard, wild, and unreal--an expression he had never seen there before, and it disturbed him. He spoke to her severely and sadly.

'Cytherea,' he said, 'I know the cause of this emotion of yours. But remember this, there was no excuse for it. You should have been woman enough to control yourself. Remember whose wife you are, and don't think anything more of a mean-spirited fellow like Springrove; he had no business to come there as he did. You are altogether wrong, Cytherea, and I am vexed with you more than I can say--very vexed.'

'Say ashamed of me at once,' she bitterly answered.

'I am ashamed of you,' he retorted angrily; 'the mood has not left you yet, then?'

'Owen,' she said, and paused. Her lip trembled; her eye told of sensations too deep for tears. 'No, Owen, it has not left me; and I will be honest. I own now to you, without any disguise of words, what last night I did not own to myself, because I hardly knew of it. I love Edward Springrove with all my strength, and heart, and soul. You call me a wanton for it, don't you? I don't care; I have gone beyond caring for anything!' She looked stonily into his face and made the speech calmly.

'Well, poor Cytherea, don't talk like that!' he said, alarmed at her manner.

'I thought that I did not love him at all,' she went on hysterically. 'A year and a half had passed since we met. I could go by the gate of his garden without thinking of him--look at his seat in church and not care. But I saw him this morning--dying because he loves me so--I know it is that! Can I help loving him too? No, I cannot, and I will love him, and I don't care! We have been separated somehow by some contrivance--I know we have. O, if I could only die!'

He held her in his arms. 'Many a woman has gone to ruin herself,' he

said, 'and brought those who love her into disgrace, by acting upon such impulses as possess you now. I have a reputation to lose as well as you. It seems that do what I will by way of remedying the stains which fell upon us, it is all doomed to be undone again.' His voice grew husky as he made the reply.

The right and only effective chord had been touched. Since she had seen Edward, she had thought only of herself and him. Owen--her name--position--future--had been as if they did not exist.

'I won't give way and become a disgrace to you, at any rate,' she said.

'Besides, your duty to society, and those about you, requires that you should live with (at any rate) all the appearance of a good wife, and try to love your husband.'

'Yes--my duty to society,' she murmured. 'But ah, Owen, it is difficult to adjust our outer and inner life with perfect honesty to all! Though it may be right to care more for the benefit of the many than for the indulgence of your own single self, when you consider that the many, and duty to them, only exist to you through your own existence, what can be said? What do our own acquaintances care about us? Not much. I think of mine. Mine will now (do they learn all the wicked frailty of my heart in this affair) look at me, smile sickly, and condemn me. And perhaps, far in time to come, when I am dead and gone, some other's accent, or some

other's song, or thought, like an old one of mine, will carry them back to what I used to say, and hurt their hearts a little that they blamed me so soon. And they will pause just for an instant, and give a sigh to me, and think, "Poor girl!" believing they do great justice to my memory by this. But they will never, never realize that it was my single opportunity of existence, as well as of doing my duty, which they are regarding; they will not feel that what to them is but a thought, easily held in those two words of pity, "Poor girl!" was a whole life to me; as full of hours, minutes, and peculiar minutes, of hopes and dreads, smiles, whisperings, tears, as theirs: that it was my world, what is to them their world, and they in that life of mine, however much I cared for them, only as the thought I seem to them to be. Nobody can enter into another's nature truly, that's what is so grievous.'

'Well, it cannot be helped,' said Owen.

'But we must not stay here,' she continued, starting up and going. 'We shall be missed. I'll do my best, Owen--I will, indeed.'

It had been decided that on account of the wretched state of the roads, the newly-married pair should not drive to the station till the latest hour in the afternoon at which they could get a train to take them to Southampton (their destination that night) by a reasonable time in the evening. They intended the next morning to cross to Havre, and thence to Paris--a place Cytherea had never visited--for their wedding tour.

The afternoon drew on. The packing was done. Cytherea was so restless that she could stay still nowhere. Miss Aldclyffe, who, though she took little part in the day's proceedings, was, as it were, instinctively conscious of all their movements, put down her charge's agitation for once as the natural result of the novel event, and Manston himself was as indulgent as could be wished.

At length Cytherea wandered alone into the conservatory. When in it, she thought she would run across to the hot-house in the outer garden, having in her heart a whimsical desire that she should also like to take a last look at the familiar flowers and luxuriant leaves collected there. She pulled on a pair of overshoes, and thither she went. Not a soul was in or around the place. The gardener was making merry on Manston's and her account.

The happiness that a generous spirit derives from the belief that it exists in others is often greater than the primary happiness itself. The gardener thought 'How happy they are!' and the thought made him happier than they.

Coming out of the forcing-house again, she was on the point of returning indoors, when a feeling that these moments of solitude would be her last of freedom induced her to prolong them a little, and she stood still, unheeding the wintry aspect of the curly-leaved plants, the straw-covered beds, and the bare fruit-trees around her. The garden, no part of which was visible from the house, sloped down to a narrow river

at the foot, dividing it from the meadows without.

A man was lingering along the public path on the other side of the river; she fancied she knew the form. Her resolutions, taken in the presence of Owen, did not fail her now. She hoped and prayed that it might not be one who had stolen her heart away, and still kept it. Why should he have reappeared at all, when he had declared that he went out of her sight for ever?

She hastily hid herself, in the lowest corner of the garden close to the river. A large dead tree, thickly robed in ivy, had been considerably depressed by its icy load of the morning, and hung low over the stream, which here ran slow and deep. The tree screened her from the eyes of any passer on the other side.

She waited timidly, and her timidity increased. She would not allow herself to see him--she would hear him pass, and then look to see if it had been Edward.

But, before she heard anything, she became aware of an object reflected in the water from under the tree which hung over the river in such a way that, though hiding the actual path, and objects upon it, it permitted their reflected images to pass beneath its boughs. The reflected form was that of the man she had seen further off, but being inverted, she could not definitely characterize him.

He was looking at the upper windows of the House--at hers--was it Edward, indeed? If so, he was probably thinking he would like to say one parting word. He came closer, gazed into the stream, and walked very slowly. She was almost certain that it was Edward. She kept more safely hidden. Conscience told her that she ought not to see him. But she suddenly asked herself a question: 'Can it be possible that he sees my reflected image, as I see his? Of course he does!'

He was looking at her in the water.

She could not help herself now. She stepped forward just as he emerged from the other side of the tree and appeared erect before her. It was Edward Springrove--till the inverted vision met his eye, dreaming no more of seeing his Cytherea there than of seeing the dead themselves.

'Cytherea!'

'Mr. Springrove,' she returned, in a low voice, across the stream.

He was the first to speak again.

'Since we have met, I want to tell you something, before we become quite as strangers to each other.'

'No--not now--I did not mean to speak--it is not right, Edward.' She spoke hurriedly and turned away from him, beating the air with her hand.

'Not one common word of explanation?' he implored. 'Don't think I am bad enough to try to lead you astray. Well, go--it is better.'

Their eyes met again. She was nearly choked. O, how she longed--and dreaded--to hear his explanation!

'What is it?' she said desperately.

'It is that I did not come to the church this morning in order to distress you: I did not, Cytherea. It was to try to speak to you before you were--married.'

He stepped closer, and went on, 'You know what has taken place? Surely you do?--my cousin is married, and I am free.'

'Married--and not to you?' Cytherea faltered, in a weak whisper.

'Yes, she was married yesterday! A rich man had appeared, and she jilted me. She said she never would have jilted a stranger, but that by jilting me, she only exercised the right everybody has of snubbing their own relations. But that's nothing now. I came to you to ask once more if.... But I was too late.'

'But, Edward, what's that, what's that!' she cried, in an agony of reproach. 'Why did you leave me to return to her? Why did you write me

that cruel, cruel letter that nearly killed me!'

'Cytherea! Why, you had grown to love--like--Mr. Manston, and how could you be anything to me--or care for me? Surely I acted naturally?'

'O no--never! I loved you--only you--not him--always you!--till lately.... I try to love him now.'

'But that can't be correct! Miss Aldclyffe told me that you wanted to hear no more of me--proved it to me!' said Edward.

'Never! she couldn't.'

'She did, Cytherea. And she sent me a letter--a love-letter, you wrote to Mr. Manston.'

'A love-letter I wrote?'

'Yes, a love-letter--you could not meet him just then, you said you were sorry, but the emotion you had felt with him made you forgetful of realities.'

The strife of thought in the unhappy girl who listened to this distortion of her meaning could find no vent in words. And then there followed the slow revelation in return, bringing with it all the misery of an explanation which comes too late. The question whether Miss

Aldclyffe were schemer or dupe was almost passed over by Cytherea, under the immediate oppressiveness of her despair in the sense that her position was irretrievable.

Not so Springrove. He saw through all the cunning half-misrepresentations--worse than downright lies--which had just been sufficient to turn the scale both with him and with her; and from the bottom of his soul he cursed the woman and man who had brought all this agony upon him and his Love. But he could not add more misery to the future of the poor child by revealing too much. The whole scheme she should never know.

'I was indifferent to my own future,' Edward said, 'and was urged to promise adherence to my engagement with my cousin Adelaide by Miss Aldclyffe: now you are married I cannot tell you how, but it was on account of my father. Being forbidden to think of you, what did I care about anything? My new thought that you still loved me was first raised by what my father said in the letter announcing my cousin's marriage. He said that although you were to be married on Old Christmas Day--that is to-morrow--he had noticed your appearance with pity: he thought you loved me still. It was enough for me--I came down by the earliest morning train, thinking I could see you some time to-day, the day, as I thought, before your marriage, hoping, but hardly daring to hope, that you might be induced to marry me. I hurried from the station; when I reached the village I saw idlers about the church, and the private gate leading to the House open. I ran into the church by the small door and

saw you come out of the vestry; I was too late. I have now told you. I was compelled to tell you. O, my lost darling, now I shall live content--or die content!'

'I am to blame, Edward, I am,' she said mournfully; 'I was taught to dread pauperism; my nights were made sleepless; there was continually reiterated in my ears till I believed it--

> '"The world and its ways have a certain worth,
> And to press a point where these oppose
> Were a simple policy."

'But I will say nothing about who influenced--who persuaded. The act is mine, after all. Edward, I married to escape dependence for my bread upon the whim of Miss Aldclyffe, or others like her. It was clearly represented to me that dependence is bearable if we have another place which we can call home; but to be a dependent and to have no other spot for the heart to anchor upon--O, it is mournful and harassing!... But that without which all persuasion would have been as air, was added by my miserable conviction that you were false; that did it, that turned me! You were to be considered as nobody to me, and Mr. Manston was invariably kind. Well, the deed is done--I must abide by it. I shall never let him know that I do not love him--never. If things had only remained as they seemed to be, if you had really forgotten me and married another woman, I could have borne it better. I wish I did not know the truth as I know it now! But our life, what is it? Let us be

brave, Edward, and live out our few remaining years with dignity. They will not be long. O, I hope they will not be long!... Now, good-bye, good-bye!'

'I wish I could be near and touch you once, just once,' said Springrove, in a voice which he vainly endeavoured to keep firm and clear.

They looked at the river, then into it; a shoal of minnows was floating over the sandy bottom, like the black dashes on miniver; though narrow, the stream was deep, and there was no bridge.

'Cytherea, reach out your hand that I may just touch it with mine.'

She stepped to the brink and stretched out her hand and fingers towards his, but not into them. The river was too wide.

'Never mind,' said Cytherea, her voice broken by agitation, 'I must be going. God bless and keep you, my Edward! God bless you!'

'I must touch you, I must press your hand,' he said.

They came near--nearer--nearer still--their fingers met. There was a long firm clasp, so close and still that each hand could feel the other's pulse throbbing beside its own.

'My Cytherea! my stolen pet lamb!'

She glanced a mute farewell from her large perturbed eyes, turned, and ran up the garden without looking back. All was over between them. The river flowed on as quietly and obtusely as ever, and the minnows gathered again in their favourite spot as if they had never been disturbed.

Nobody indoors guessed from her countenance and bearing that her heart was near to breaking with the intensity of the misery which gnawed there. At these times a woman does not faint, or weep, or scream, as she will in the moment of sudden shocks. When lanced by a mental agony of such refined and special torture that it is indescribable by men's words, she moves among her acquaintances much as before, and contrives so to cast her actions in the old moulds that she is only considered to be rather duller than usual.

5. HALF-PAST TWO TO FIVE O'CLOCK P.M.

Owen accompanied the newly-married couple to the railway-station, and in his anxiety to see the last of his sister, left the brougham and stood upon his crutches whilst the train was starting.

When the husband and wife were about to enter the railway-carriage they saw one of the porters looking frequently and furtively at them. He was pale, and apparently very ill.

'Look at that poor sick man,' said Cytherea compassionately, 'surely he ought not to be here.'

'He's been very queer to-day, madam, very queer,' another porter answered. 'He do hardly hear when he's spoken to, and d' seem giddy, or as if something was on his mind. He's been like it for this month past, but nothing so bad as he is to-day.'

'Poor thing.'

She could not resist an innate desire to do some just thing on this most deceitful and wretched day of her life. Going up to him she gave him money, and told him to send to the old manor-house for wine or whatever he wanted.

The train moved off as the trembling man was murmuring his incoherent thanks. Owen waved his hand; Cytherea smiled back to him as if it were unknown to her that she wept all the while.

Owen was driven back to the Old House. But he could not rest in the lonely place. His conscience began to reproach him for having forced on the marriage of his sister with a little too much peremptoriness. Taking up his crutches he went out of doors and wandered about the muddy roads with no object in view save that of getting rid of time.

The clouds which had hung so low and densely during the day cleared from

the west just now as the sun was setting, calling forth a weakly twitter from a few small birds. Owen crawled down the path to the waterfall, and lingered thereabout till the solitude of the place oppressed him, when he turned back and into the road to the village. He was sad; he said to himself--

'If there is ever any meaning in those heavy feelings which are called presentiments--and I don't believe there is--there will be in mine to-day.... Poor little Cytherea!'

At that moment the last low rays of the sun touched the head and shoulders of a man who was approaching, and showed him up to Owen's view. It was old Mr. Springrove. They had grown familiar with each other by reason of Owen's visits to Knapwater during the past year. The farmer inquired how Owen's foot was progressing, and was glad to see him so nimble again.

'How is your son?' said Owen mechanically.

'He is at home, sitting by the fire,' said the farmer, in a sad voice. 'This morning he slipped indoors from God knows where, and there he sits and mopes, and thinks, and thinks, and presses his head so hard, that I can't help feeling for him.'

'Is he married?' said Owen. Cytherea had feared to tell him of the interview in the garden.

'No. I can't quite understand how the matter rests.... Ah! Edward, too, who started with such promise; that he should now have become such a careless fellow--not a month in one place. There, Mr. Graye, I know what it is mainly owing to. If it hadn't been for that heart affair, he might have done--but the less said about him the better. I don't know what we should have done if Miss Aldclyffe had insisted upon the conditions of the leases. Your brother-in-law, the steward, had a hand in making it light for us, I know, and I heartily thank him for it.' He ceased speaking, and looked round at the sky.

'Have you heard o' what's happened?' he said suddenly; 'I was just coming out to learn about it.'

'I haven't heard of anything.'

'It is something very serious, though I don't know what. All I know is what I heard a man call out bynow--that it very much concerns somebody who lives in the parish.'

It seems singular enough, even to minds who have no dim beliefs in adumbration and presentiment, that at that moment not the shadow of a thought crossed Owen's mind that the somebody whom the matter concerned
might be himself, or any belonging to him. The event about to transpire was as portentous to the woman whose welfare was more dear to him than

his own, as any, short of death itself, could possibly be; and ever afterwards, when he considered the effect of the knowledge the next half-hour conveyed to his brain, even his practical good sense could not refrain from wonder that he should have walked toward the village after hearing those words of the farmer, in so leisurely and unconcerned a way. 'How unutterably mean must my intelligence have appeared to the eye of a foreseeing God,' he frequently said in after-time. 'Columbus on the eve of his discovery of a world was not so contemptibly unaware.'

After a few additional words of common-place the farmer left him, and, as has been said, Owen proceeded slowly and indifferently towards the village.

The labouring men had just left work, and passed the park gate, which opened into the street as Owen came down towards it. They went along in a drift, earnestly talking, and were finally about to turn in at their respective doorways. But upon seeing him they looked significantly at one another, and paused. He came into the road, on that side of the village-green which was opposite the row of cottages, and turned round to the right. When Owen turned, all eyes turned; one or two men went hurriedly indoors, and afterwards appeared at the doorstep with their wives, who also contemplated him, talking as they looked. They seemed uncertain how to act in some matter.

'If they want me, surely they will call me,' he thought, wondering more and more. He could no longer doubt that he was connected with the

subject of their discourse.

The first who approached him was a boy.

'What has occurred?' said Owen.

'O, a man ha' got crazy-religious, and sent for the pa'son.'

'Is that all?'

'Yes, sir. He wished he was dead, he said, and he's almost out of his mind wi' wishen it so much. That was before Mr. Raunham came.'

'Who is he?' said Owen.

'Joseph Chinney, one of the railway-porters; he used to be night-porter.'

'Ah--the man who was ill this afternoon; by the way, he was told to come to the Old House for something, but he hasn't been. But has anything else happened--anything that concerns the wedding to-day?'

'No, sir.'

Concluding that the connection which had seemed to be traced between himself and the event must in some way have arisen from Cytherea's

friendliness towards the man, Owen turned about and went homewards in a much quieter frame of mind--yet scarcely satisfied with the solution. The route he had chosen led through the dairy-yard, and he opened the gate.

Five minutes before this point of time, Edward Springrove was looking over one of his father's fields at an outlying hamlet of three or four cottages some mile and a half distant. A turnpike-gate was close by the gate of the field.

The carrier to Casterbridge came up as Edward stepped into the road, and jumped down from the van to pay toll. He recognized Springrove. 'This is a pretty set-to in your place, sir,' he said. 'You don't know about it, I suppose?'

'What?' said Springrove.

The carrier paid his dues, came up to Edward, and spoke ten words in a confidential whisper: then sprang upon the shafts of his vehicle, gave a clinching nod of significance to Springrove, and rattled away.

Edward turned pale with the intelligence. His first thought was, 'Bring her home!'

The next--did Owen Graye know what had been discovered? He probably did by that time, but no risks of probability must be run by a woman

he loved dearer than all the world besides. He would at any rate make perfectly sure that her brother was in possession of the knowledge, by telling it him with his own lips.

Off he ran in the direction of the old manor-house.

The path was across arable land, and was ploughed up with the rest of the field every autumn, after which it was trodden out afresh. The thaw had so loosened the soft earth, that lumps of stiff mud were lifted by his feet at every leap he took, and flung against him by his rapid motion, as it were doggedly impeding him, and increasing tenfold the customary effort of running,

But he ran on--uphill, and downhill, the same pace alike--like the shadow of a cloud. His nearest direction, too, like Owen's, was through the dairy-barton, and as Owen entered it he saw the figure of Edward rapidly descending the opposite hill, at a distance of two or three hundred yards. Owen advanced amid the cows.

The dairyman, who had hitherto been talking loudly on some absorbing subject to the maids and men milking around him, turned his face towards the head of the cow when Owen passed, and ceased speaking.

Owen approached him and said--

'A singular thing has happened, I hear. The man is not insane, I

suppose?'

'Not he--he's sensible enough,' said the dairyman, and paused. He was a man noisy with his associates--stolid and taciturn with strangers.

'Is it true that he is Chinney, the railway-porter?'

'That's the man, sir.' The maids and men sitting under the cows were all attentively listening to this discourse, milking irregularly, and softly directing the jets against the sides of the pail.

Owen could contain himself no longer, much as his mind dreaded anything of the nature of ridicule. 'The people all seem to look at me, as if something seriously concerned me; is it this stupid matter, or what is it?'

'Surely, sir, you know better than anybody else if such a strange thing concerns you.'

'What strange thing?'

'Don't you know! His confessing to Parson Raunham.'

'What did he confess? Tell me.'

'If you really ha'n't heard, 'tis this. He was as usual on duty at the

station on the night of the fire last year, otherwise he wouldn't ha' known it.'

'Known what? For God's sake tell, man!'

But at this instant the two opposite gates of the dairy-yard, one on the east, the other on the west side, slammed almost simultaneously.

The rector from one, Springrove from the other, came striding across the barton.

Edward was nearest, and spoke first. He said in a low voice: 'Your sister is not legally married! His first wife is still living! How it comes out I don't know!'

'O, here you are at last, Mr. Graye, thank Heaven!' said the rector breathlessly. 'I have been to the Old House, and then to Miss Aldclyffe's looking for you--something very extraordinary.' He beckoned to Owen, afterwards included Springrove in his glance, and the three stepped aside together.

'A porter at the station. He was a curious nervous man. He had been in a strange state all day, but he wouldn't go home. Your sister was kind to him, it seems, this afternoon. When she and her husband had gone, he went on with his work, shifting luggage-vans. Well, he got in the way, as if he were quite lost to what was going on, and they sent him home at

last. Then he wished to see me. I went directly. There was something on his mind, he said, and told it. About the time when the fire of last November twelvemonth was got under, whilst he was by himself in the porter's room, almost asleep, somebody came to the station and tried to open the door. He went out and found the person to be the lady he had accompanied to Carriford earlier in the evening, Mrs. Manston. She asked, when would be another train to London? The first the next morning, he told her, was at a quarter-past six o'clock from Budmouth, but that it was express, and didn't stop at Carriford Road--it didn't stop till it got to Anglebury. "How far is it to Anglebury?" she said. He told her, and she thanked him, and went away up the line. In a short time she ran back and took out her purse. "Don't on any account say a word in the village or anywhere that I have been here, or a single breath about me--I'm ashamed ever to have come." He promised; she took out two sovereigns. "Swear it on the Testament in the waiting-room," she said, "and I'll pay you these." He got the book, took an oath upon it, received the money, and she left him. He was off duty at half-past five. He has kept silence all through the intervening time till now, but lately the knowledge he possessed weighed heavily upon his conscience and weak mind. Yet the nearer came the wedding-day, the more he feared to tell. The actual marriage filled him with remorse. He says your sister's kindness afterwards was like a knife going through his heart. He thought he had ruined her.'

'But whatever can be done? Why didn't he speak sooner?' cried Owen.

'He actually called at my house twice yesterday,' the rector continued, 'resolved, it seems, to unburden his mind. I was out both times--he left no message, and, they say, he looked relieved that his object was defeated. Then he says he resolved to come to you at the Old House last night--started, reached the door, and dreaded to knock--and then went home again.'

'Here will be a tale for the newsmongers of the county,' said Owen bitterly. 'The idea of his not opening his mouth sooner--the criminality of the thing!'

'Ah, that's the inconsistency of a weak nature. But now that it is put to us in this way, how much more probable it seems that she should have escaped than have been burnt--'

'You will, of course, go straight to Mr. Manston, and ask him what it all means?' Edward interrupted.

'Of course I shall! Manston has no right to carry off my sister unless he's her husband,' said Owen. 'I shall go and separate them.'

'Certainly you will,' said the rector.

'Where's the man?'

'In his cottage.'

''Tis no use going to him, either. I must go off at once and overtake them--lay the case before Manston, and ask him for additional and certain proofs of his first wife's death. An up-train passes soon, I think.'

'Where have they gone?' said Edward.

'To Paris--as far as Southampton this afternoon, to proceed to-morrow morning.'

'Where in Southampton?'

'I really don't know--some hotel. I only have their Paris address. But I shall find them by making a few inquiries.'

The rector had in the meantime been taking out his pocket-book, and now opened it at the first page, whereon it was his custom every month to gum a small railway time-table--cut from the local newspaper.

'The afternoon express is just gone,' he said, holding open the page, 'and the next train to Southampton passes at ten minutes to six o'clock. Now it wants--let me see--five-and-forty minutes to that time. Mr. Graye, my advice is that you come with me to the porter's cottage, where I will shortly write out the substance of what he has said, and get him to sign it. You will then have far better grounds for interfering

between Mr. and Mrs. Manston than if you went to them with a mere hearsay story.'

The suggestion seemed a good one. 'Yes, there will be time before the train starts,' said Owen.

Edward had been musing restlessly.

'Let me go to Southampton in your place, on account of your lameness?' he said suddenly to Graye.

'I am much obliged to you, but I think I can scarcely accept the offer,' returned Owen coldly. 'Mr. Manston is an honourable man, and I had much better see him myself.'

'There is no doubt,' said Mr. Raunham, 'that the death of his wife was fully believed in by himself.'

'None whatever,' said Owen; 'and the news must be broken to him, and the question of other proofs asked, in a friendly way. It would not do for Mr. Springrove to appear in the case at all.' He still spoke rather coldly; the recollection of the attachment between his sister and Edward was not a pleasant one to him.

'You will never find them,' said Edward. 'You have never been to Southampton, and I know every house there.'

'That makes little difference,' said the rector; 'he will have a cab. Certainly Mr. Graye is the proper man to go on the errand.'

'Stay; I'll telegraph to ask them to meet me when I arrive at the terminus,' said Owen; 'that is, if their train has not already arrived.'

Mr. Raunham pulled out his pocket-book again. 'The two-thirty train reached Southampton a quarter of an hour ago,' he said.

It was too late to catch them at the station. Nevertheless, the rector suggested that it would be worth while to direct a message to 'all the respectable hotels in Southampton,' on the chance of its finding them, and thus saving a deal of personal labour to Owen in searching about the place.

'I'll go and telegraph, whilst you return to the man,' said Edward--an offer which was accepted. Graye and the rector then turned off in the direction of the porter's cottage.

Edward, to despatch the message at once, hurriedly followed the road towards the station, still restlessly thinking. All Owen's proceedings were based on the assumption, natural under the circumstances, of Manston's good faith, and that he would readily acquiesce in any arrangement which should clear up the mystery. 'But,' thought Edward, 'suppose--and Heaven forgive me, I cannot help supposing it--that

Manston is not that honourable man, what will a young and inexperienced fellow like Owen do? Will he not be hoodwinked by some specious story or another, framed to last till Manston gets tired of poor Cytherea? And then the disclosure of the truth will ruin and blacken both their futures irremediably.'

However, he proceeded to execute his commission. This he put in the form of a simple request from Owen to Manston, that Manston would come to the Southampton platform, and wait for Owen's arrival, as he valued his reputation. The message was directed as the rector had suggested, Edward guaranteeing to the clerk who sent it off that every expense connected with the search would be paid.

No sooner had the telegram been despatched than his heart sank within him at the want of foresight shown in sending it. Had Manston, all the time, a knowledge that his first wife lived, the telegram would be a forewarning which might enable him to defeat Owen still more signally.

Whilst the machine was still giving off its multitudinous series of raps, Edward heard a powerful rush under the shed outside, followed by a long sonorous creak. It was a train of some sort, stealing softly into the station, and it was an up-train. There was the ring of a bell. It was certainly a passenger train.

Yet the booking-office window was closed.

'Ho, ho, John, seventeen minutes after time and only three stations up the line. The incline again?' The voice was the stationmaster's, and the reply seemed to come from the guard.

'Yes, the other side of the cutting. The thaw has made it all in a perfect cloud of fog, and the rails are as slippery as glass. We had to bring them through the cutting at twice.'

'Anybody else for the four-forty-five express?' the voice continued. The few passengers, having crossed over to the other side long before this time, had taken their places at once.

A conviction suddenly broke in upon Edward's mind; then a wish overwhelmed him. The conviction--as startling as it was sudden--was that Manston was a villain, who at some earlier time had discovered that his wife lived, and had bribed her to keep out of sight, that he might possess Cytherea. The wish was--to proceed at once by this very train that was starting, find Manston before he would expect from the words of the telegram (if he got it) that anybody from Carriford could be with him--charge him boldly with the crime, and trust to his consequent confusion (if he were guilty) for a solution of the extraordinary riddle, and the release of Cytherea!

The ticket-office had been locked up at the expiration of the time at which the train was due. Rushing out as the guard blew his whistle, Edward opened the door of a carriage and leapt in. The train moved

along, and he was soon out of sight.

Springrove had long since passed that peculiar line which lies across the course of falling in love--if, indeed, it may not be called the initial itself of the complete passion--a longing to cherish; when the woman is shifted in a man's mind from the region of mere admiration to the region of warm fellowship. At this assumption of her nature, she changes to him in tone, hue, and expression. All about the loved one that said 'She' before, says 'We' now. Eyes that were to be subdued become eyes to be feared for: a brain that was to be probed by cynicism becomes a brain that is to be tenderly assisted; feet that were to be tested in the dance become feet that are not to be distressed; the once-criticized accent, manner, and dress, become the clients of a special pleader.

6. FIVE TO EIGHT O'CLOCK P.M.

Now that he was fairly on the track, and had begun to cool down, Edward remembered that he had nothing to show--no legal authority whatever to question Manston or interfere between him and Cytherea as husband and wife. He now saw the wisdom of the rector in obtaining a signed confession from the porter. The document would not be a death-bed confession--perhaps not worth anything legally--but it would be held by Owen; and he alone, as Cytherea's natural guardian, could separate them on the mere ground of an unproved probability, or what might perhaps be called the hallucination of an idiot. Edward himself, however, was as

firmly convinced as the rector had been of the truth of the man's story, and paced backward and forward the solitary compartment as the train wound through the dark heathery plains, the mazy woods, and moaning coppices, as resolved as ever to pounce on Manston, and charge him with the crime during the critical interval between the reception of the telegram and the hour at which Owen's train would arrive--trusting to circumstances for what he should say and do afterwards, but making up his mind to be a ready second to Owen in any emergency that might arise.

At thirty-three minutes past seven he stood on the platform of the station at Southampton--a clear hour before the train containing Owen could possibly arrive.

Making a few inquiries here, but too impatient to pursue his investigation carefully and inductively, he went into the town.

At the expiration of another half-hour he had visited seven hotels and inns, large and small, asking the same questions at each, and always receiving the same reply--nobody of that name, or answering to that description, had been there. A boy from the telegraph-office had called, asking for the same persons, if they recollected rightly.

He reflected awhile, struck again by a painful thought that they might possibly have decided to cross the Channel by the night-boat. Then he hastened off to another quarter of the town to pursue his inquiries among hotels of the more old-fashioned and quiet class. His stained and

weary appearance obtained for him but a modicum of civility, wherever he went, which made his task yet more difficult. He called at three several houses in this neighbourhood, with the same result as before. He entered the door of the fourth house whilst the clock of the nearest church was striking eight.

'Have a tall gentleman named Manston, and a young wife arrived here this evening?' he asked again, in words which had grown odd to his ears from very familiarity.

'A new-married couple, did you say?'

'They are, though I didn't say so.'

'They have taken a sitting-room and bedroom, number thirteen.'

'Are they indoors?'

'I don't know. Eliza!'

'Yes, m'm.'

'See if number thirteen is in--that gentleman and his wife.'

'Yes, m'm.'

'Has any telegram come for them?' said Edward, when the maid had gone on her errand.

'No--nothing that I know of.'

'Somebody did come and ask if a Mr. and Mrs. Masters, or some such name, were here this evening,' said another voice from the back of the bar-parlour.

'And did they get the message?'

'Of course they did not--they were not here--they didn't come till half-an-hour after that. The man who made inquiries left no message. I told them when they came that they, or a name something like theirs, had been asked for, but they didn't seem to understand why it should be, and so the matter dropped.'

The chambermaid came back. 'The gentleman is not in, but the lady is. Who shall I say?'

'Nobody,' said Edward. For it now became necessary to reflect upon his method of proceeding. His object in finding their whereabouts--apart from the wish to assist Owen--had been to see Manston, ask him flatly for an explanation, and confirm the request of the message in the presence of Cytherea--so as to prevent the possibility of the steward's palming off a story upon Cytherea, or eluding her brother when he came.

But here were two important modifications of the expected condition of affairs. The telegram had not been received, and Cytherea was in the house alone.

He hesitated as to the propriety of intruding upon her in Manston's absence. Besides, the women at the bottom of the stairs would see him--his intrusion would seem odd--and Manston might return at any moment. He certainly might call, and wait for Manston with the accusation upon his tongue, as he had intended. But it was a doubtful course. That idea had been based upon the assumption that Cytherea was not married. If the first wife were really dead after all--and he felt sick at the thought--Cytherea as the steward's wife might in after-years--perhaps, at once--be subjected to indignity and cruelty on account of an old lover's interference now.

Yes, perhaps the announcement would come most properly and safely for her from her brother Owen, the time of whose arrival had almost expired.

But, on turning round, he saw that the staircase and passage were quite deserted. He and his errand had as completely died from the minds of the attendants as if they had never been. There was absolutely nothing between him and Cytherea's presence. Reason was powerless now; he must see her--right or wrong, fair or unfair to Manston--offensive to her brother or no. His lips must be the first to tell the alarming story to her. Who loved her as he! He went back lightly through the hall, up the stairs, two at a time, and followed the corridor till he came to the

door numbered thirteen.

He knocked softly: nobody answered.

There was no time to lose if he would speak to Cytherea before Manston came. He turned the handle of the door and looked in. The lamp on the table burned low, and showed writing materials open beside it; the chief light came from the fire, the direct rays of which were obscured by a sweet familiar outline of head and shoulders--still as precious to him as ever.

7. A QUARTER-PAST EIGHT O'CLOCK P.M.

There is an attitude--approximatively called pensive--in which the soul of a human being, and especially of a woman, dominates outwardly and expresses its presence so strongly, that the intangible essence seems more apparent than the body itself. This was Cytherea's expression now. What old days and sunny eves at Budmouth Bay was she picturing? Her reverie had caused her not to notice his knock.

'Cytherea!' he said softly.

She let drop her hand, and turned her head, evidently thinking that her visitor could be no other than Manston, yet puzzled at the voice.

There was no preface on Springrove's tongue; he forgot his

position--hers--that he had come to ask quietly if Manston had other proofs of being a widower--everything--and jumped to a conclusion.

'You are not his wife, Cytherea--come away, he has a wife living!' he cried in an agitated whisper. 'Owen will be here directly.'

She started up, recognized the tidings first, the bearer of them afterwards. 'Not his wife? O, what is it--what--who is living?' She awoke by degrees. 'What must I do? Edward, it is you! Why did you come? Where is Owen?'

'What has Manston shown you in proof of the death of his other wife? Tell me quick.'

'Nothing--we have never spoken of the subject. Where is my brother Owen? I want him, I want him!'

'He is coming by-and-by. Come to the station to meet him--do,' implored Springrove. 'If Mr. Manston comes, he will keep you from me: I am nobody,' he added bitterly, feeling the reproach her words had faintly shadowed forth.

'Mr. Manston is only gone out to post a letter he has just written,' she said, and without being distinctly cognizant of the action, she wildly looked for her bonnet and cloak, and began putting them on, but in the act of fastening them uttered a spasmodic cry.

'No, I'll not go out with you,' she said, flinging the articles down again. Running to the door she flitted along the passage, and downstairs.

'Give me a private room--quite private,' she said breathlessly to some one below.

'Number twelve is a single room, madam, and unoccupied,' said some tongue in astonishment.

Without waiting for any person to show her into it, Cytherea hurried upstairs again, brushed through the corridor, entered the room specified, and closed the door. Edward heard her sob out--

'Nobody but Owen shall speak to me--nobody!'

'He will be here directly,' said Springrove, close against the panel, and then went towards the stairs. He had seen her; it was enough.

He descended, stepped into the street, and hastened to meet Owen at the railway-station.

As for the poor maiden who had received the news, she knew not what to think. She listened till the echo of Edward's footsteps had died away, then bowed her face upon the bed. Her sudden impulse had been to escape

from sight. Her weariness after the unwonted strain, mental and bodily, which had been put upon her by the scenes she had passed through during the long day, rendered her much more timid and shaken by her position than she would naturally have been. She thought and thought of that single fact which had been told her--that the first Mrs. Manston was still living--till her brain seemed ready to burst its confinement with excess of throbbing. It was only natural that she should, by degrees, be unable to separate the discovery, which was matter of fact, from the suspicion of treachery on her husband's part, which was only matter of inference. And thus there arose in her a personal fear of him.

'Suppose he should come in now and seize me!' This at first mere frenzied supposition grew by degrees to a definite horror of his presence, and especially of his intense gaze. Thus she raised herself to a heat of excitement, which was none the less real for being vented in no cry of any kind. No; she could not meet Manston's eye alone, she would only see him in her brother's company.

Almost delirious with this idea, she ran and locked the door to prevent all possibility of her intentions being nullified, or a look or word being flung at her by anybody whilst she knew not what she was.

8. HALF-PAST EIGHT O'CLOCK P.M.

Then Cytherea felt her way amid the darkness of the room till she came to the head of the bed, where she searched for the bell-rope and gave it

a pull. Her summons was speedily answered by the landlady herself, whose curiosity to know the meaning of these strange proceedings knew no bounds. The landlady attempted to turn the handle of the door. Cytherea kept the door locked. 'Please tell Mr. Manston when he comes that I am ill,' she said from the inside, 'and that I cannot see him.'

'Certainly I will, madam,' said the landlady. 'Won't you have a fire?'

'No, thank you.'

'Nor a light?'

'I don't want one, thank you.'

'Nor anything?'

'Nothing.'

The landlady withdrew, thinking her visitor half insane.

Manston came in about five minutes later, and went at once up to the sitting-room, fully expecting to find his wife there. He looked round, rang, and was told the words Cytherea had said, that she was too ill to be seen.

'She is in number twelve room,' added the maid.

Manston was alarmed, and knocked at the door. 'Cytherea!'

'I am unwell, I cannot see you,' she said.

'Are you seriously ill, dearest? Surely not.'

'No, not seriously.'

'Let me come in; I will get a doctor.'

'No, he can't see me either.'

'She won't open the door, sir, not to nobody at all!' said the chambermaid, with wonder-waiting eyes.

'Hold your tongue, and be off!' said Manston with a snap.

The maid vanished.

'Come, Cytherea, this is foolish--indeed it is--not opening the door.... I cannot comprehend what can be the matter with you. Nor can a doctor either, unless he sees you.'

Her voice had trembled more and more at each answer she gave, but nothing could induce her to come out and confront him. Hating scenes,

Manston went back to the sitting-room, greatly irritated and perplexed.

And there Cytherea from the adjoining room could hear him pacing up and down. She thought, 'Suppose he insists upon seeing me--he probably may--and will burst open the door!' This notion increased, and she sank into a corner in a half-somnolent state, but with ears alive to the slightest sound. Reason could not overthrow the delirious fancy that outside her door stood Manston and all the people in the hotel, waiting to laugh her to scorn.

9. HALF-PAST EIGHT TO ELEVEN P.M.

In the meantime, Springrove was pacing up and down the arrival platform of the railway-station. Half-past eight o'clock--the time at which Owen's train was due--had come, and passed, but no train appeared.

'When will the eight-thirty train be in?' he asked of a man who was sweeping the mud from the steps.

'She is not expected yet this hour.'

'How is that?'

'Christmas-time, you see, 'tis always so. People are running about to see their friends. The trains have been like it ever since Christmas Eve, and will be for another week yet.'

Edward again went on walking and waiting under the draughty roof. He found it utterly impossible to leave the spot. His mind was so intent upon the importance of meeting with Owen, and informing him of Cytherea's whereabouts, that he could not but fancy Owen might leave the station unobserved if he turned his back, and become lost to him in the streets of the town.

The hour expired. Ten o'clock struck. 'When will the train be in?' said Edward to the telegraph clerk.

'In five-and-thirty minutes. She's now at L----. They have extra passengers, and the rails are bad to-day.'

At last, at a quarter to eleven, the train came in.

The first to alight from it was Owen, looking pale and cold. He casually glanced round upon the nearly deserted platform, and was hurrying to the outlet, when his eyes fell upon Edward. At sight of his friend he was quite bewildered, and could not speak.

'Here I am, Mr. Graye,' said Edward cheerfully. 'I have seen Cytherea, and she has been waiting for you these two or three hours.'

Owen took Edward's hand, pressed it, and looked at him in silence. Such was the concentration of his mind, that not till many minutes after did

he think of inquiring how Springrove had contrived to be there before him.

10. ELEVEN O'CLOCK P.M.

On their arrival at the door of the hotel, it was arranged between Springrove and Graye that the latter only should enter, Edward waiting outside. Owen had remembered continually what his friend had frequently overlooked, that there was yet a possibility of his sister being Manston's wife, and the recollection taught him to avoid any rashness in his proceedings which might lead to bitterness hereafter.

Entering the room, he found Manston sitting in the chair which had been occupied by Cytherea on Edward's visit, three hours earlier. Before Owen had spoken, Manston arose, and stepping past him closed the door. His face appeared harassed--much more troubled than the slight circumstance which had as yet come to his knowledge seemed to account for.

Manston could form no reason for Owen's presence, but intuitively linked it with Cytherea's seclusion. 'Altogether this is most unseemly,' he said, 'whatever it may mean.'

'Don't think there is meant anything unfriendly by my coming here,' said Owen earnestly; 'but listen to this, and think if I could do otherwise than come.'

He took from his pocket the confession of Chinney the porter, as hastily written out by the vicar, and read it aloud. The aspects of Manston's face whilst he listened to the opening words were strange, dark, and mysterious enough to have justified suspicions that no deceit could be too complicated for the possessor of such impulses, had there not overridden them all, as the reading went on, a new and irrepressible expression--one unmistakably honest. It was that of unqualified amazement in the steward's mind at the news he heard. Owen looked up and saw it. The sight only confirmed him in the belief he had held throughout, in antagonism to Edward's suspicions.

There could no longer be a shadow of doubt that if the first Mrs. Manston lived, her husband was ignorant of the fact. What he could have feared by his ghastly look at first, and now have ceased to fear, it was quite futile to conjecture.

'Now I do not for a moment doubt your complete ignorance of the whole matter; you cannot suppose for an instant that I do,' said Owen when he had finished reading. 'But is it not best for both that Cytherea should come back with me till the matter is cleared up? In fact, under the circumstances, no other course is left open to me than to request it.'

Whatever Manston's original feelings had been, all in him now gave way to irritation, and irritation to rage. He paced up and down the room till he had mastered it; then said in ordinary tones--

'Certainly, I know no more than you and others know--it was a gratuitous unpleasantness in you to say you did not doubt me. Why should you, or anybody, have doubted me?'

'Well, where is my sister?' said Owen.

'Locked in the next room.'

His own answer reminded Manston that Cytherea must, by some inscrutable
means, have had an inkling of the event.

Owen had gone to the door of Cytherea's room.

'Cytherea, darling--'tis Owen,' he said, outside the door. A rustling of clothes, soft footsteps, and a voice saying from the inside, 'Is it really you, Owen,--is it really?'

'It is.'

'O, will you take care of me?'

'Always.'

She unlocked the door, and retreated again. Manston came forward from the other room with a candle in his hand, as Owen pushed open the door.

Her frightened eyes were unnaturally large, and shone like stars in the darkness of the background, as the light fell upon them. She leapt up to Owen in one bound, her small taper fingers extended like the leaves of a lupine. Then she clasped her cold and trembling hands round his neck and shivered.

The sight of her again kindled all Manston's passions into activity. 'She shall not go with you,' he said firmly, and stepping a pace or two closer, 'unless you prove that she is not my wife; and you can't do it!'

'This is proof,' said Owen, holding up the paper.

'No proof at all,' said Manston hotly. ''Tis not a death-bed confession, and those are the only things of the kind held as good evidence.'

'Send for a lawyer,' Owen returned, 'and let him tell us the proper course to adopt.'

'Never mind the law--let me go with Owen!' cried Cytherea, still holding on to him. 'You will let me go with him, won't you, sir?' she said, turning appealingly to Manston.

'We'll have it all right and square,' said Manston, with more quietness. 'I have no objection to your brother sending for a lawyer, if he wants to.'

It was getting on for twelve o'clock, but the proprietor of the hotel had not yet gone to bed on account of the mystery on the first floor, which was an occurrence unusual in the quiet family lodging. Owen looked over the banisters, and saw him standing in the hall. It struck Graye that the wisest course would be to take the landlord to a certain extent into their confidence, appeal to his honour as a gentleman, and so on, in order to acquire the information he wanted, and also to prevent the episode of the evening from becoming a public piece of news. He called the landlord up to where they stood, and told him the main facts of the story.

The landlord was fortunately a quiet, prejudiced man, and a meditative smoker.

'I know the very man you want to see--the very man,' he said, looking at the general features of the candle-flame. 'Sharp as a needle, and not over-rich. Timms will put you all straight in no time--trust Timms for that.'

'He's in bed by this time for certain,' said Owen.

'Never mind that--Timms knows me, I know him. He'll oblige me as a personal favour. Wait here a bit. Perhaps, too, he's up at some party or another--he's a nice, jovial fellow, sharp as a needle, too; mind you, sharp as a needle, too.'

He went downstairs, put on his overcoat, and left the house, the three persons most concerned entering the room, and standing motionless, awkward, and silent in the midst of it. Cytherea pictured to herself the long weary minutes she would have to stand there, whilst a sleepy man could be prepared for consultation, till the constraint between them seemed unendurable to her--she could never last out the time. Owen was annoyed that Manston had not quietly arranged with him at once; Manston at Owen's homeliness of idea in proposing to send for an attorney, as if he would be a touchstone of infallible proof.

Reflection was cut short by the approach of footsteps, and in a few moments the proprietor of the hotel entered, introducing his friend. 'Mr. Timms has not been in bed,' he said; 'he had just returned from dining with a few friends, so there's no trouble given. To save time I explained the matter as we came along.'

It occurred to Owen and Manston both that they might get a misty exposition of the law from Mr. Timms at that moment of concluding dinner with a few friends.

'As far as I can see,' said the lawyer, yawning, and turning his vision inward by main force, 'it is quite a matter for private arrangement between the parties, whoever the parties are--at least at present. I speak more as a father than as a lawyer, it is true, but, let the young lady stay with her father, or guardian, safe out of shame's way, until

the mystery is sifted, whatever the mystery is. Should the evidence prove to be false, or trumped up by anybody to get her away from you, her husband, you may sue them for the damages accruing from the delay.'

'Yes, yes,' said Manston, who had completely recovered his self-possession and common-sense; 'let it all be settled by herself.' Turning to Cytherea he whispered so softly that Owen did not hear the words--

'Do you wish to go back with your brother, dearest, and leave me here miserable, and lonely, or will you stay with me, your own husband.'

'I'll go back with Owen.'

'Very well.' He relinquished his coaxing tone, and went on sternly: 'And remember this, Cytherea, I am as innocent of deception in this thing as you are yourself. Do you believe me?'

'I do,' she said.

'I had no shadow of suspicion that my first wife lived. I don't think she does even now. Do you believe me?'

'I believe you,' she said.

'And now, good-evening,' he continued, opening the door and politely

intimating to the three men standing by that there was no further necessity for their remaining in his room. 'In three days I shall claim her.'

The lawyer and the hotel-keeper retired first. Owen, gathering up as much of his sister's clothing as lay about the room, took her upon his arm, and followed them. Edward, to whom she owed everything, who had been left standing in the street like a dog without a home, was utterly forgotten. Owen paid the landlord and the lawyer for the trouble he had occasioned them, looked to the packing, and went to the door.

A fly, which somewhat unaccountably was seen lingering in front of the house, was called up, and Cytherea's luggage put upon it.

'Do you know of any hotel near the station that is open for night arrivals?' Owen inquired of the driver.

'A place has been bespoke for you, sir, at the White Unicorn--and the gentleman wished me to give you this.'

'Bespoken by Springrove, who ordered the fly, of course,' said Owen to himself. By the light of the street-lamp he read these lines, hurriedly traced in pencil:--

'I have gone home by the mail-train. It is better for all parties that I should be out of the way. Tell Cytherea that I apologize for having

caused her such unnecessary pain, as it seems I did--but it cannot be helped now. E.S.'

Owen handed his sister into the vehicle, and told the flyman to drive on.

'Poor Springrove--I think we have served him rather badly,' he said to Cytherea, repeating the words of the note to her.

A thrill of pleasure passed through her bosom as she listened to them. They were the genuine reproach of a lover to his mistress; the trifling coldness of her answer to him would have been noticed by no man who was only a friend. But, in entertaining that sweet thought, she had forgotten herself, and her position for the instant.

Was she still Manston's wife--that was the terrible supposition, and her future seemed still a possible misery to her. For, on account of the late jarring accident, a life with Manston which would otherwise have been only a sadness, must become a burden of unutterable sorrow.

Then she thought of the misrepresentation and scandal that would ensue if she were no wife. One cause for thankfulness accompanied the reflection; Edward knew the truth.

They soon reached the quiet old inn, which had been selected for them by the forethought of the man who loved her well. Here they installed

themselves for the night, arranging to go to Budmouth by the first train the next day.

At this hour Edward Springrove was fast approaching his native county on the wheels of the night-mail.

XIV. THE EVENTS OF FIVE WEEKS

1. FROM THE SIXTH TO THE THIRTEENTH OF JANUARY

Manston had evidently resolved to do nothing in a hurry.

This much was plain, that his earnest desire and intention was to raise in Cytherea's bosom no feelings of permanent aversion to him. The instant after the first burst of disappointment had escaped him in the hotel at Southampton, he had seen how far better it would be to lose her presence for a week than her respect for ever.

'She shall be mine; I will claim the young thing yet,' he insisted. And then he seemed to reason over methods for compassing that object, which, to all those who were in any degree acquainted with the recent event, appeared the least likely of possible contingencies.