BOOK VI.

ISABEL, AND THE FIRST PART OF THE STORY OF ISABEL.

I.

Half wishful that the hour would come; half shuddering that every moment it still came nearer and more near to him; dry-eyed, but wet with that dark day's rain; at fall of eve, Pierre emerged from long wanderings in the primeval woods of Saddle Meadows, and for one instant stood motionless upon their sloping skirt.

Where he stood was in the rude wood road, only used by sledges in the time of snow; just where the out-posted trees formed a narrow arch, and fancied gateway leading upon the far, wide pastures sweeping down toward the lake. In that wet and misty eve the scattered, shivering pasture elms seemed standing in a world inhospitable, yet rooted by inscrutable sense of duty to their place. Beyond, the lake lay in one sheet of blankness and of dumbness, unstirred by breeze or breath; fast bound there it lay, with not life enough to reflect the smallest shrub or twig. Yet in that lake was seen the duplicate, stirless sky above. Only in sunshine did that lake catch gay, green images; and these but displaced the imaged muteness of the unfeatured heavens.

On both sides, in the remoter distance, and also far beyond the mild

lake's further shore, rose the long, mysterious mountain masses; shaggy with pines and hemlocks, mystical with nameless, vapory exhalations, and in that dim air black with dread and gloom. At their base, profoundest forests lay entranced, and from their far owl-haunted depths of caves and rotted leaves, and unused and unregarded inland overgrowth of decaying wood--for smallest sticks of which, in other climes many a pauper was that moment perishing; from out the infinite inhumanities of those profoundest forests, came a moaning, muttering, roaring, intermitted, changeful sound: rain-shakings of the palsied trees, slidings of rocks undermined, final crashings of long-riven boughs, and devilish gibberish of the forest-ghosts.

But more near, on the mild lake's hither shore, where it formed a long semi-circular and scooped acclivity of corn-fields, there the small and low red farm-house lay; its ancient roof a bed of brightest mosses; its north front (from the north the moss-wind blows), also moss-incrusted, like the north side of any vast-trunked maple in the groves. At one gabled end, a tangled arbor claimed support, and paid for it by generous gratuities of broad-flung verdure, one viny shaft of which pointed itself upright against the chimney-bricks, as if a waving lightning-rod. Against the other gable, you saw the lowly dairy-shed; its sides close netted with traced Madeira vines; and had you been close enough, peeping through that imprisoning tracery, and through the light slats barring the little embrasure of a window, you might have seen the gentle and contented captives--the pans of milk, and the snow-white Dutch cheeses in a row, and the molds of golden butter, and the jars of lily cream. In

front, three straight gigantic lindens stood guardians of this verdant spot. A long way up, almost to the ridge-pole of the house, they showed little foliage; but then, suddenly, as three huge green balloons, they poised their three vast, inverted, rounded cones of verdure in the air.

Soon as Pierre's eye rested on the place, a tremor shook him. Not alone because of Isabel, as there a harborer now, but because of two dependent and most strange coincidences which that day's experience had brought to him. He had gone to breakfast with his mother, his heart charged to overflowing with presentiments of what would probably be her haughty disposition concerning such a being as Isabel, claiming her maternal love: and lo! the Reverend Mr. Falsgrave enters, and Ned and Delly are discussed, and that whole sympathetic matter, which Pierre had despaired of bringing before his mother in all its ethic bearings, so as absolutely to learn her thoughts upon it, and thereby test his own conjectures; all that matter had been fully talked about; so that, through that strange coincidence, he now perfectly knew his mother's mind, and had received forewarnings, as if from heaven, not to make any present disclosure to her. That was in the morning; and now, at eve catching a glimpse of the house where Isabel was harboring, at once he recognized it as the rented farm-house of old Walter Ulver, father to the self-same Delly, forever ruined through the cruel arts of Ned.

Strangest feelings, almost supernatural, now stole into Pierre. With little power to touch with awe the souls of less susceptible, reflective, and poetic beings, such coincidences, however frequently

they may recur, ever fill the finer organization with sensations which transcend all verbal renderings. They take hold of life's subtlest problem. With the lightning's flash, the query is spontaneously propounded--chance, or God? If too, the mind thus influenced be likewise a prey to any settled grief, then on all sides the query magnifies, and at last takes in the all-comprehending round of things. For ever is it seen, that sincere souls in suffering, then most ponder upon final causes. The heart, stirred to its depths, finds correlative sympathy in the head, which likewise is profoundly moved. Before miserable men, when intellectual, all the ages of the world pass as in a manacled procession, and all their myriad links rattle in the mournful mystery.

Pacing beneath the long-skirting shadows of the elevated wood, waiting for the appointed hour to come, Pierre strangely strove to imagine to himself the scene which was destined to ensue. But imagination utterly failed him here; the reality was too real for him; only the face, the face alone now visited him; and so accustomed had he been of late to confound it with the shapes of air, that he almost trembled when he thought that face to face, that face must shortly meet his own.

And now the thicker shadows begin to fall; the place is lost to him; only the three dim, tall lindens pilot him as he descends the hill, hovering upon the house. He knows it not, but his meditative route is sinuous; as if that moment his thought's stream was likewise serpentining: laterally obstructed by insinuated misgivings as to the ultimate utilitarian advisability of the enthusiast resolution that was

his. His steps decrease in quickness as he comes more nigh, and sees one feeble light struggling in the rustic double-casement. Infallibly he knows that his own voluntary steps are taking him forever from the brilliant chandeliers of the mansion of Saddle Meadows, to join company with the wretched rush-lights of poverty and woe. But his sublime intuitiveness also paints to him the sun-like glories of god-like truth and virtue; which though ever obscured by the dense fogs of earth, still shall shine eventually in unclouded radiance, casting illustrative light upon the sapphire throne of God.

II.

He stands before the door; the house is steeped in silence; he knocks; the casement light flickers for a moment, and then moves away; within, he hears a door creak on its hinges; then his whole heart beats wildly as the outer latch is lifted; and holding the light above her supernatural head, Isabel stands before him. It is herself. No word is spoken; no other soul is seen. They enter the room of the double casement; and Pierre sits down, overpowered with bodily faintness and spiritual awe. He lifts his eyes to Isabel's gaze of loveliness and loneliness; and then a low, sweet, half-sobbing voice of more than natural musicalness is heard:--

"And so, thou art my brother;--shall I call thee Pierre?"

Steadfastly, with his one first and last fraternal inquisition of the person of the mystic girl, Pierre now for an instant eyes her; and in that one instant sees in the imploring face, not only the nameless touchingness of that of the sewing-girl, but also the subtler expression of the portrait of his then youthful father, strangely translated, and intermarryingly blended with some before unknown, foreign femininenes. In one breath, Memory and Prophecy, and Intuition tell him--"Pierre, have no reserves; no minutest possible doubt;--this being is thy sister; thou gazest on thy father's flesh."

"And so thou art my brother!--shall I call thee Pierre?"

He sprang to his feet, and caught her in his undoubting arms.

"Thou art! thou art!"

He felt a faint struggling within his clasp; her head drooped against him; his whole form was bathed in the flowing glossiness of her long and unimprisoned hair. Brushing the locks aside, he now gazed upon the death-like beauty of the face, and caught immortal sadness from it. She seemed as dead; as suffocated,--the death that leaves most unimpaired the latent tranquillities and sweetnesses of the human countenance.

He would have called aloud for succor; but the slow eyes opened upon him; and slowly he felt the girl's supineness leaving her; and now she recovers herself a little,--and again he feels her faintly struggling in

his arms, as if somehow abashed, and incredulous of mortal right to hold her so. Now Pierre repents his over-ardent and incautious warmth, and feels himself all reverence for her. Tenderly he leads her to a bench within the double casement; and sits beside her; and waits in silence, till the first shock of this encounter shall have left her more composed and more prepared to hold communion with him.

"How feel'st thou now, my sister?"

"Bless thee! bless thee!"

Again the sweet, wild power of the musicalness of the voice, and some soft, strange touch of foreignness in the accent,--so it fancifully seemed to Pierre, thrills through and through his soul. He bent and kissed her brow; and then feels her hand seeking his, and then clasping it without one uttered word.

All his being is now condensed in that one sensation of the clasping hand. He feels it as very small and smooth, but strangely hard. Then he knew that by the lonely labor of her hands, his own father's daughter had earned her living in the same world, where he himself, her own brother, had so idly dwelled. Once more he reverently kissed her brow, and his warm breath against it murmured with a prayer to heaven.

"I have no tongue to speak to thee, Pierre, my brother. My whole being, all my life's thoughts and longings are in endless arrears to thee; then

how can I speak to thee? Were it God's will, Pierre, my utmost blessing now, were to lie down and die. Then should I be at peace. Bear with me, Pierre."

"Eternally will I do that, my beloved Isabel! Speak not to me yet awhile, if that seemeth best to thee, if that only is possible to thee. This thy clasping hand, my sister, this is now thy tongue to me."

"I know not where to begin to speak to thee, Pierre; and yet my soul o'erbrims in me."

"From my heart's depths, I love and reverence thee; and feel for thee, backward and forward, through all eternity!"

"Oh, Pierre, can'st thou not cure in me this dreaminess, this bewilderingness I feel? My poor head swims and swims, and will not pause. My life can not last long thus; I am too full without discharge. Conjure tears for me, Pierre; that my heart may not break with the present feeling,--more death-like to me than all my grief gone by!"

"Ye thirst-slaking evening skies, ye hilly dews and mists, distil your moisture here! The bolt hath passed; why comes not the following shower?--Make her to weep!"

Then her head sought his support; and big drops fell on him; and anon, Isabel gently slid her head from him, and sat a little composedly beside

him.

"If thou feelest in endless arrears of thought to me, my sister; so do I feel toward thee. I too, scarce know what I should speak to thee. But when thou lookest on me, my sister, thou beholdest one, who in his soul hath taken vows immutable, to be to thee, in all respects, and to the uttermost bounds and possibilities of Fate, thy protecting and all-acknowledging brother!"

"Not mere sounds of common words, but inmost tones of my heart's deepest melodies should now be audible to thee. Thou speakest to a human thing, but something heavenly should answer thee;--some flute heard in the air should answer thee; for sure thy most undreamed-of accents, Pierre, sure they have not been unheard on high. Blessings that are imageless to all mortal fancyings, these shall be thine for this."

"Blessing like to thine, doth but recoil and bless homeward to the heart that uttered it. I can not bless thee, my sister, as thou dost bless thyself in blessing my unworthiness. But, Isabel, by still keeping present the first wonder of our meeting, we shall make our hearts all feebleness. Let me then rehearse to thee what Pierre is; what life hitherto he hath been leading; and what hereafter he shall lead;--so thou wilt be prepared."

"Nay, Pierre, that is my office; thou art first entitled to my tale, then, if it suit thee, thou shalt make me the unentitled gift of thine.

Listen to me, now. The invisible things will give me strength;--it is not much, Pierre;--nor aught very marvelous. Listen then;--I feel soothed down to utterance now."

During some brief, interluding, silent pauses in their interview thus far, Pierre had heard a soft, slow, sad, to-and-fro, meditative stepping on the floor above; and in the frequent pauses that intermitted the strange story in the following chapter, that same soft, slow, sad, to-and-fro, meditative, and most melancholy stepping, was again and again audible in the silent room.

III.

"I never knew a mortal mother. The farthest stretch of my life's memory can not recall one single feature of such a face. If, indeed, mother of mine hath lived, she is long gone, and cast no shadow on the ground she trod. Pierre, the lips that do now speak to thee, never touched a woman's breast; I seem not of woman born. My first dim life-thoughts cluster round an old, half-ruinous house in some region, for which I now have no chart to seek it out. If such a spot did ever really exist, that too seems to have been withdrawn from all the remainder of the earth. It was a wild, dark house, planted in the midst of a round, cleared, deeply-sloping space, scooped out of the middle of deep stunted pine woods. Ever I shrunk at evening from peeping out of my window, lest the ghostly pines should steal near to me, and reach out their grim arms to

snatch me into their horrid shadows. In summer the forest unceasingly hummed with unconjecturable voices of unknown birds and beasts. In winter its deep snows were traced like any paper map, with dotting night-tracks of four-footed creatures, that, even to the sun, were never visible, and never were seen by man at all. In the round open space the dark house stood, without one single green twig or leaf to shelter it; shadeless and shelterless in the heart of shade and shelter. Some of the windows were rudely boarded up, with boards nailed straight up and down; and those rooms were utterly empty, and never were entered, though they were doorless. But often, from the echoing corridor, I gazed into them with fear; for the great fire-places were all in ruins; the lower tier of back-stones were burnt into one white, common crumbling; and the black bricks above had fallen upon the hearths, heaped here and there with the still falling soot of long-extinguished fires. Every hearth-stone in that house had one long crack through it; every floor drooped at the corners; and outside, the whole base of the house, where it rested on the low foundation of greenish stones, was strewn with dull, yellow molderings of the rotting sills. No name; no scrawled or written thing; no book, was in the house; no one memorial speaking of its former occupants. It was dumb as death. No grave-stone, or mound, or any little hillock around the house, betrayed any past burials of man or child. And thus, with no trace then to me of its past history, thus it hath now entirely departed and perished from my slightest knowledge as to where that house so stood, or in what region it so stood. None other house like it have I ever seen. But once I saw plates of the outside of French chateaux which powerfully recalled its dim image to me,

especially the two rows of small dormer windows projecting from the inverted hopper-roof. But that house was of wood, and these of stone. Still, sometimes I think that house was not in this country, but somewhere in Europe; perhaps in France; but it is all bewildering to me; and so you must not start at me, for I can not but talk wildly upon so wild a theme.

"In this house I never saw any living human soul, but an old man and woman. The old man's face was almost black with age, and was one purse of wrinkles, his hoary beard always tangled, streaked with dust and earthy crumbs. I think in summer he toiled a little in the garden, or some spot like that, which lay on one side of the house. All my ideas are in uncertainty and confusion here. But the old man and the old woman seem to have fastened themselves indelibly upon my memory. I suppose their being the only human things around me then, that caused the hold they took upon me. They seldom spoke to me; but would sometimes, of dark, gusty nights, sit by the fire and stare at me, and then mumble to each other, and then stare at me again. They were not entirely unkind to me; but, I repeat, they seldom or never spoke to me. What words or language they used to each other, this it is impossible for me to recall. I have often wished to; for then I might at least have some additional idea whether the house was in this country or somewhere beyond the sea. And here I ought to say, that sometimes I have, I know not what sort of vague remembrances of at one time--shortly after the period I now speak of--chattering in two different childish languages; one of which waned in me as the other and latter grew. But more of this

anon. It was the woman that gave me my meals; for I did not eat with them. Once they sat by the fire with a loaf between them, and a bottle of some thin sort of reddish wine; and I went up to them, and asked to eat with them, and touched the loaf. But instantly the old man made a motion as if to strike me, but did not, and the woman, glaring at me, snatched the loaf and threw it into the fire before them. I ran frightened from the room; and sought a cat, which I had often tried to coax into some intimacy, but, for some strange cause, without success. But in my frightened loneliness, then, I sought the cat again, and found her up-stairs, softly scratching for some hidden thing among the litter of the abandoned fire-places. I called to her, for I dared not go into the haunted chamber; but she only gazed sideways and unintelligently toward me; and continued her noiseless searchings. I called again, and then she turned round and hissed at me; and I ran down stairs, still stung with the thought of having been driven away there, too. I now knew not where to go to rid myself of my loneliness. At last I went outside of the house, and sat down on a stone, but its coldness went up to my heart, and I rose and stood on my feet. But my head was dizzy; I could not stand; I fell, and knew no more. But next morning I found myself in bed in my uncheerable room, and some dark bread and a cup of water by me.

"It has only been by chance that I have told thee this one particular reminiscence of my early life in that house. I could tell many more like it, but this is enough to show what manner of life I led at that time. Every day that I then lived, I felt all visible sights and all audible

sounds growing stranger and stranger, and fearful and more fearful to me. To me the man and the woman were just like the cat; none of them would speak to me; none of them were comprehensible to me. And the man, and the woman, and the cat, were just like the green foundation stones of the house to me; I knew not whence they came, or what cause they had for being there. I say again, no living human soul came to the house but the man and the woman; but sometimes the old man early trudged away to a road that led through the woods, and would not come back till late in the evening; he brought the dark bread, and the thin, reddish wine with him. Though the entrance to the wood was not so very far from the door, yet he came so slowly and infirmly trudging with his little load, that it seemed weary hours on hours between my first descrying him among the trees, and his crossing the splintered threshold.

"Now the wide and vacant blurrings of my early life thicken in my mind. All goes wholly memoryless to me now. It may have been that about that time I grew sick with some fever, in which for a long interval I lost myself. Or it may be true, which I have heard, that after the period of our very earliest recollections, then a space intervenes of entire unknowingness, followed again by the first dim glimpses of the succeeding memory, more or less distinctly embracing all our past up to that one early gap in it.

"However this may be, nothing more can I recall of the house in the wide open space; nothing of how at last I came to leave it; but I must have been still extremely young then. But some uncertain, tossing memory have

I of being at last in another round, open space, but immensely larger than the first one, and with no encircling belt of woods. Yet often it seems to me that there were three tall, straight things like pine-trees somewhere there nigh to me at times; and that they fearfully shook and snapt as the old trees used to in the mountain storms. And the floors seemed sometimes to droop at the corners still more steeply than the old floors did; and changefully drooped too, so that I would even seem to feel them drooping under me.

"Now, too, it was that, as it sometimes seems to me, I first and last chattered in the two childish languages I spoke of a little time ago. There seemed people about me, some of whom talked one, and some the other; but I talked both; yet one not so readily as the other; and but beginningly as it were; still this other was the one which was gradually displacing the former. The men who--as it sometimes dreamily seems to me at times--often climbed the three strange tree-like things, they talked--I needs must think--if indeed I have any real thought about so bodiless a phantom as this is--they talked the language which I speak of as at this time gradually waning in me. It was a bonny tongue; oh, seems to me so sparkling-gay and lightsome; just the tongue for a child like me, if the child had not been so sad always. It was pure children's language, Pierre; so twittering--such a chirp.

"In thy own mind, thou must now perceive, that most of these dim remembrances in me, hint vaguely of a ship at sea. But all is dim and vague to me. Scarce know I at any time whether I tell you real things,

or the unrealest dreams. Always in me, the solidest things melt into dreams, and dreams into solidities. Never have I wholly recovered from the effects of my strange early life. This it is, that even now--this moment--surrounds thy visible form, my brother, with a mysterious mistiness; so that a second face, and a third face, and a fourth face peep at me from within thy own. Now dim, and more dim, grows in me all the memory of how thou and I did come to meet. I go groping again amid all sorts of shapes, which part to me; so that I seem to advance through the shapes; and yet the shapes have eyes that look at me. I turn round, and they look at me; I step forward, and they look at me.--Let me be silent now; do not speak to me."

IV.

Filled with nameless wonderings at this strange being, Pierre sat mute, intensely regarding her half-averted aspect. Her immense soft tresses of the jettiest hair had slantingly fallen over her as though a curtain were half drawn from before some saint enshrined. To Pierre, she seemed half unearthly; but this unearthliness was only her mysteriousness, not any thing that was repelling or menacing to him. And still, the low melodies of her far interior voice hovered in sweet echoes in the room; and were trodden upon, and pressed like gushing grapes, by the steady invisible pacing on the floor above.

She moved a little now, and after some strange wanderings more

coherently continued.

"My next memory which I think I can in some degree rely upon, was yet another house, also situated away from human haunts, in the heart of a not entirely silent country. Through this country, and by the house, wound a green and lagging river. That house must have been in some lowland; for the first house I spoke of seems to me to have been somewhere among mountains, or near to mountains;--the sounds of the far waterfalls,--I seem to hear them now; the steady up-pointed cloud-shapes behind the house in the sunset sky--I seem to see them now. But this other house, this second one, or third one, I know not which, I say again it was in some lowland. There were no pines around it; few trees of any sort; the ground did not slope so steeply as around the first house. There were cultivated fields about it, and in the distance farm-houses, and out-houses, and cattle, and fowls, and many objects of that familiar sort. This house I am persuaded was in this country; on this side of the sea. It was a very large house, and full of people; but for the most part they lived separately. There were some old people in it, and there were young men, and young women in it,--some very handsome; and there were children in it. It seemed a happy place to some of these people; many of them were always laughing; but it was not a happy place for me.

"But here I may err, because of my own consciousness I can not identify in myself--I mean in the memory of my whole foregoing life,--I say, I can not identify that thing which is called happiness; that thing whose

token is a laugh, or a smile, or a silent serenity on the lip. I may have been happy, but it is not in my conscious memory now. Nor do I feel a longing for it, as though I had never had it; my spirit seeks different food from happiness; for I think I have a suspicion of what it is. I have suffered wretchedness, but not because of the absence of happiness, and without praying for happiness. I pray for peace--for motionlessness--for the feeling of myself, as of some plant, absorbing life without seeking it, and existing without individual sensation. I feel that there can be no perfect peace in individualness. Therefore I hope one day to feel myself drank up into the pervading spirit animating all things. I feel I am an exile here. I still go straying.--Yes; in thy speech, thou smilest.--But let me be silent again. Do not answer me. When I resume, I will not wander so, but make short end."

Reverently resolved not to offer the slightest let or hinting hindrance to the singular tale rehearsing to him, but to sit passively and receive its marvelous droppings into his soul, however long the pauses; and as touching less mystical considerations, persuaded that by so doing he should ultimately derive the least nebulous and imperfect account of Isabel's history; Pierre still sat waiting her resuming, his eyes fixed upon the girl's wonderfully beautiful ear, which chancing to peep forth from among her abundant tresses, nestled in that blackness like a transparent sea-shell of pearl.

She moved a little now; and after some strange wanderings more coherently continued; while the sound of the stepping on the floor

above--it seemed to cease.

"I have spoken of the second or rather the third spot in my memory of the past, as it first appeared to me; I mean, I have spoken of the people in the house, according to my very earliest recallable impression of them. But I stayed in that house for several years--five, six, perhaps, seven years--and during that interval of my stay, all things changed to me, because I learned more, though always dimly. Some of its occupants departed; some changed from smiles to tears; some went moping all the day; some grew as savages and outrageous, and were dragged below by dumb-like men into deep places, that I knew nothing of, but dismal sounds came through the lower floor, groans and clanking fallings, as of iron in straw. Now and then, I saw coffins silently at noon-day carried into the house, and in five minutes' time emerge again, seemingly heavier than they entered; but I saw not who was in them. Once, I saw an immense-sized coffin, endwise pushed through a lower window by three men who did not speak; and watching, I saw it pushed out again, and they drove off with it. But the numbers of those invisible persons who thus departed from the house, were made good by other invisible persons arriving in close carriages. Some in rags and tatters came on foot, or rather were driven on foot. Once I heard horrible outcries, and peeping from my window, saw a robust but squalid and distorted man, seemingly a peasant, tied by cords with four long ends to them, held behind by as many ignorant-looking men who with a lash drove the wild squalid being that way toward the house. Then I heard answering hand-clappings, shrieks, howls, laughter, blessings, prayers, oaths,

hymns, and all audible confusions issuing from all the chambers of the house.

"Sometimes there entered the house--though only transiently, departing within the hour they came--people of a then remarkable aspect to me. They were very composed of countenance; did not laugh; did not groan; did not weep; did not make strange faces; did not look endlessly fatigued; were not strangely and fantastically dressed; in short, did not at all resemble any people I had ever seen before, except a little like some few of the persons of the house, who seemed to have authority over the rest. These people of a remarkable aspect to me, I thought they were strangely demented people;--composed of countenance, but wandering of mind; soul-composed and bodily-wandering, and strangely demented people.

"By-and-by, the house seemed to change again, or else my mind took in more, and modified its first impressions. I was lodged up-stairs in a little room; there was hardly any furniture in the room; sometimes I wished to go out of it; but the door was locked. Sometimes the people came and took me out of the room, into a much larger and very long room, and here I would collectively see many of the other people of the house, who seemed likewise brought from distant and separate chambers. In this long room they would vacantly roam about, and talk vacant talk to each other. Some would stand in the middle of the room gazing steadily on the floor for hours together, and never stirred, but only breathed and gazed upon the floor. Some would sit crouching in the corner, and sit

crouching there, and only breathe and crouch in the corners. Some kept their hands tight on their hearts, and went slowly promenading up and down, moaning and moaning to themselves. One would say to another--"Feel of it--here, put thy hand in the break." Another would mutter--"Broken, broken, broken"--and would mutter nothing but that one word broken. But most of them were dumb, and could not, or would not speak, or had forgotten how to speak. They were nearly all pale people. Some had hair white as snow, and yet were quite young people. Some were always talking about Hell, Eternity, and God; and some of all things as fixedly decreed; others would say nay to this, and then they would argue, but without much conviction either way. But once nearly all the people present--even the dumb moping people, and the sluggish persons crouching in the corners--nearly all of them laughed once, when after a whole day's loud babbling, two of these predestinarian opponents, said each to the other--'Thou hast convinced me, friend; but we are quits; for so also, have I convinced thee, the other way; now then, let's argue it all over again; for still, though mutually converted, we are still at odds.' Some harangued the wall; some apostrophized the air; some hissed at the air; some lolled their tongues out at the air; some struck the air; some made motions, as if wrestling with the air, and fell out of the arms of the air, panting from the invisible hug.

"Now, as in the former thing, thou must, ere this, have suspected what manner of place this second or third house was, that I then lived in. But do not speak the word to me. That word has never passed my lips; even now, when I hear the word, I run from it; when I see it printed in

a book, I run from the book. The word is wholly unendurable to me. Who brought me to the house; how I came there, I do not know. I lived a long time in the house; that alone I know; I say I know, but still I am uncertain; still Pierre, still the--oh the dreaminess, the bewilderingness--it never entirely leaves me. Let me be still again."

She leaned away from him; she put her small hard hand to her forehead; then moved it down, very slowly, but still hardly over her eyes, and kept it there, making no other sign, and still as death. Then she moved and continued her vague tale of terribleness.

"I must be shorter; I did not mean to turn off into the mere offshootings of my story, here and there; but the dreaminess I speak of leads me sometimes; and I, as impotent then, obey the dreamy prompting. Bear with me; now I will be briefer."

"It came to pass, at last, that there was a contention about me in the house; some contention which I heard in the after rumor only, not at the actual time. Some strangers had arrived; or had come in haste, being sent for to the house. Next day they dressed me in new and pretty, but still plain clothes, and they took me down stairs, and out into the air, and into a carriage with a pleasant-looking woman, a stranger to me; and I was driven off a good way, two days nearly we drove away, stopping somewhere over-night; and on the evening of the second day we came to another house, and went into it, and stayed there.

"This house was a much smaller one than the other, and seemed sweetly quiet to me after that. There was a beautiful infant in it; and this beautiful infant always archly and innocently smiling on me, and strangely beckoning me to come and play with it, and be glad with it; and be thoughtless, and be glad and gleeful with it; this beautiful infant first brought me to my own mind, as it were; first made me sensible that I was something different from stones, trees, cats; first undid in me the fancy that all people were as stones, trees, cats; first filled me with the sweet idea of humanness; first made me aware of the infinite mercifulness, and tenderness, and beautifulness of humanness; and this beautiful infant first filled me with the dim thought of Beauty; and equally, and at the same time, with the feeling of the Sadness; of the immortalness and universalness of the Sadness. I now feel that I should soon have gone,---- stop me now; do not let me go that way. I owe all things to that beautiful infant. Oh, how I envied it, lying in its happy mother's breast, and drawing life and gladness, and all its perpetual smilingness from that white and smiling breast. That infant saved me; but still gave me vague desirings. Now I first began to reflect in my mind; to endeavor after the recalling past things; but try as I would, little could I recall, but the bewilderingness;--and the stupor, and the torpor, and the blackness, and the dimness, and the vacant whirlingness of the bewilderingness. Let me be still again."

And the stepping on the floor above,--it then resumed.

V.

"I must have been nine, or ten, or eleven years old, when the pleasant-looking woman carried me away from the large house. She was a farmer's wife; and now that was my residence, the farm-house. They taught me to sew, and work with wool, and spin the wool; I was nearly always busy now. This being busy, too, this it must have been, which partly brought to me the power of being sensible of myself as something human. Now I began to feel strange differences. When I saw a snake trailing through the grass, and darting out the fire-fork from its mouth, I said to myself, That thing is not human, but I am human. When the lightning flashed, and split some beautiful tree, and left it to rot from all its greenness, I said, That lightning is not human, but I am human. And so with all other things. I can not speak coherently here; but somehow I felt that all good, harmless men and women were human things, placed at cross-purposes, in a world of snakes and lightnings, in a world of horrible and inscrutable inhumanities. I have had no training of any sort. All my thoughts well up in me; I know not whether they pertain to the old bewilderings or not; but as they are, they are, and I can not alter them, for I had nothing to do with putting them in my mind, and I never affect any thoughts, and I never adulterate any thoughts; but when I speak, think forth from the tongue, speech being sometimes before the thought; so, often, my own tongue teaches me new things.

"Now as yet I never had questioned the woman, or her husband, or the young girls, their children, why I had been brought to the house, or how long I was to stay in the house. There I was; just as I found myself in the world; there I was; for what cause I had been brought into the world, would have been no stranger question to me, than for what cause I had been brought to the house. I knew nothing of myself, or any thing pertaining to myself; I felt my pulse, my thought; but other things I was ignorant of, except the general feeling of my humanness among the inhumanities. But as I grew older, I expanded in my mind. I began to learn things out of me; to see still stranger, and minuter differences. I called the woman mother, and so did the other girls; yet the woman often kissed them, but seldom me. She always helped them first at table. The farmer scarcely ever spoke to me. Now months, years rolled on, and the young girls began to stare at me. Then the bewilderingness of the old starings of the solitary old man and old woman, by the cracked hearth-stone of the desolate old house, in the desolate, round, open space; the bewilderingness of those old starings now returned to me; and the green starings, and the serpent hissings of the uncompanionable cat, recurred to me, and the feeling of the infinite forlornness of my life rolled over me. But the woman was very kind to me; she taught the girls not to be cruel to me; she would call me to her, and speak cheerfully to me, and I thanked--not God, for I had been taught no God--I thanked the bright human summer, and the joyful human sun in the sky; I thanked the human summer and the sun, that they had given me the woman; and I would sometimes steal away into the beautiful grass, and worship the kind summer and the sun; and often say over to myself the soft words, summer

and the sun.

"Still, weeks and years ran on, and my hair began to vail me with its fullness and its length; and now often I heard the word beautiful, spoken of my hair, and beautiful, spoken of myself. They would not say the word openly to me, but I would by chance overhear them whispering it. The word joyed me with the human feeling of it. They were wrong not to say it openly to me; my joy would have been so much the more assured for the openness of their saying beautiful, to me; and I know it would have filled me with all conceivable kindness toward every one. Now I had heard the word beautiful, whispered, now and then, for some months, when a new being came to the house; they called him gentleman. His face was wonderful to me. Something strangely like it, and yet again unlike it, I had seen before, but where, I could not tell. But one day, looking into the smooth water behind the house, there I saw the likeness--something strangely like, and yet unlike, the likeness of his face. This filled me with puzzlings. The new being, the gentleman, he was very gracious to me; he seemed astonished, confounded at me; he looked at me, then at a very little, round picture--so it seemed--which he took from his pocket, and yet concealed from me. Then he kissed me, and looked with tenderness and grief upon me; and I felt a tear fall on me from him. Then he whispered a word into my ear. 'Father,' was the word he whispered; the same word by which the young girls called the farmer. Then I knew it was the word of kindness and of kisses. I kissed the gentleman.

"When he left the house I wept for him to come again. And he did come again. All called him my father now. He came to see me once every month or two; till at last he came not at all; and when I wept and asked for him, they said the word Dead to me. Then the bewilderings of the comings and the goings of the coffins at the large and populous house; these bewilderings came over me. What was it to be dead? What is it to be living? Wherein is the difference between the words Death and Life? Had I been ever dead? Was I living? Let me be still again. Do not speak to me."

And the stepping on the floor above; again it did resume.

"Months ran on; and now I somehow learned that my father had every now and then sent money to the woman to keep me with her in the house; and that no more money had come to her after he was dead; the last penny of the former money was now gone. Now the farmer's wife looked troubledly and painfully at me; and the farmer looked unpleasantly and impatiently at me. I felt that something was miserably wrong; I said to myself, I am one too many; I must go away from the pleasant house. Then the bewilderings of all the loneliness and forlornness of all my forlorn and lonely life; all these bewilderings and the whelmings of the bewilderings rolled over me; and I sat down without the house, but could not weep.

"But I was strong, and I was a grown girl now. I said to the woman--Keep me hard at work; let me work all the time, but let me stay with thee.

But the other girls were sufficient to do the work; me they wanted not. The farmer looked out of his eyes at me, and the out-lookings of his eyes said plainly to me--Thee we do not want; go from us; thou art one too many; and thou art more than one too many. Then I said to the woman--Hire me out to some one; let me work for some one.--But I spread too wide my little story. I must make an end.

"The woman listened to me, and through her means I went to live at another house, and earned wages there. My work was milking the cows, and making butter, and spinning wool, and weaving carpets of thin strips of cloth. One day there came to this house a pedler. In his wagon he had a guitar, an old guitar, yet a very pretty one, but with broken strings. He had got it slyly in part exchange from the servants of a grand house some distance off. Spite of the broken strings, the thing looked very graceful and beautiful to me; and I knew there was melodiousness lurking in the thing, though I had never seen a guitar before, nor heard of one; but there was a strange humming in my heart that seemed to prophesy of the hummings of the guitar. Intuitively, I knew that the strings were not as they should be. I said to the man--I will buy of thee the thing thou callest a guitar. But thou must put new strings to it. So he went to search for them; and brought the strings, and restringing the guitar, tuned it for me. So with part of my earnings I bought the guitar. Straightway I took it to my little chamber in the gable, and softly laid it on my bed. Then I murmured; sung and murmured to it; very lowly, very softly; I could hardly hear myself. And I changed the modulations of my singings and my murmurings; and still sung, and murmured, lowly,

softly,--more and more; and presently I heard a sudden sound: sweet and low beyond all telling was the sweet and sudden sound. I clapt my hands; the guitar was speaking to me; the dear guitar was singing to me; murmuring and singing to me, the guitar. Then I sung and murmured to it with a still different modulation; and once more it answered me from a different string; and once more it murmured to me, and it answered to me with a different string. The guitar was human; the guitar taught me the secret of the guitar; the guitar learned me to play on the guitar. No music-master have I ever had but the guitar. I made a loving friend of it; a heart friend of it. It sings to me as I to it. Love is not all on one side with my guitar. All the wonders that are unimaginable and unspeakable; all these wonders are translated in the mysterious melodiousness of the guitar. It knows all my past history. Sometimes it plays to me the mystic visions of the confused large house I never name. Sometimes it brings to me the bird-twitterings in the air; and sometimes it strikes up in me rapturous pulsations of legendary delights eternally unexperienced and unknown to me. Bring me the guitar."

VI.

Entranced, lost, as one wandering bedazzled and amazed among innumerable dancing lights, Pierre had motionlessly listened to this abundant-haired, and large-eyed girl of mystery.

"Bring me the guitar!"

Starting from his enchantment, Pierre gazed round the room, and saw the instrument leaning against a corner. Silently he brought it to the girl, and silently sat down again.

"Now listen to the guitar; and the guitar shall sing to thee the sequel of my story; for not in words can it be spoken. So listen to the guitar."

Instantly the room was populous with sounds of melodiousness, and mournfulness, and wonderfulness; the room swarmed with the unintelligible but delicious sounds. The sounds seemed waltzing in the room; the sounds hung pendulous like glittering icicles from the corners of the room; and fell upon him with a ringing silveryness; and were drawn up again to the ceiling, and hung pendulous again, and dropt down upon him again with the ringing silveryness. Fire-flies seemed buzzing in the sounds; summer-lightnings seemed vividly yet softly audible in the sounds.

And still the wild girl played on the guitar; and her long dark shower of curls fell over it, and vailed it; and still, out from the vail came the swarming sweetness, and the utter unintelligibleness, but the infinite significancies of the sounds of the guitar.

"Girl of all-bewildering mystery!" cried Pierre--"Speak to me;--sister, if thou indeed canst be a thing that's mortal--speak to me, if thou be

Isabel!"

"Mystery! Mystery!
Mystery of Isabel!
Mystery! Mystery!
Isabel and Mystery!"

Among the waltzings, and the droppings, and the swarmings of the sounds, Pierre now heard the tones above deftly stealing and winding among the myriad serpentinings of the other melody:--deftly stealing and winding as respected the instrumental sounds, but in themselves wonderfully and abandonedly free and bold--bounding and rebounding as from multitudinous reciprocal walls; while with every syllable the hair-shrouded form of Isabel swayed to and fro with a like abandonment, and suddenness, and wantonness:--then it seemed not like any song; seemed not issuing from any mouth; but it came forth from beneath the same vail concealing the guitar.

Now a strange wild heat burned upon his brow; he put his hand to it. Instantly the music changed; and drooped and changed; and changed and changed; and lingeringly retreated as it changed; and at last was wholly gone.

Pierre was the first to break the silence.

"Isabel, thou hast filled me with such wonderings; I am so distraught

with thee, that the particular things I had to tell to thee, when I hither came; these things I can not now recall, to speak them to thee:--I feel that something is still unsaid by thee, which at some other time thou wilt reveal. But now I can stay no longer with thee. Know me eternally as thy loving, revering, and most marveling brother, who will never desert thee, Isabel. Now let me kiss thee and depart, till to-morrow night; when I shall open to thee all my mind, and all my plans concerning me and thee. Let me kiss thee, and adieu!"

As full of unquestioning and unfaltering faith in him, the girl sat motionless and heard him out. Then silently rose, and turned her boundlessly confiding brow to him. He kissed it thrice, and without another syllable left the place.