# The star dreamer: A romance

Agnes Castle and Egerton Castle

# Contents

Opening pages 6

BOOK I 13

BOOK I — CHAPTER I FAIR, YOUNG, CAPABLE HANDS 14

BOOK I — CHAPTER II A MASS OF SELFISHNESS 24

BOOK I — CHAPTER III RUSTLING LEAVES OF MEMORY 30

BOOK I — CHAPTER IV BACK AT A NEW DOOR OF LIFE 36

BOOK I — CHAPTER V QUENCHLESS STARS ELOQUENT 46

BOOK I — CHAPTER VI EYES, BLUE AS HIS STAR 52

BOOK I — CHAPTER VII NEW ROADS UNFOLDING 62

BOOK I — CHAPTER VIII WARM HEART, SUPERFLUOUS WISDOM 69

BOOK I — CHAPTER IX HEALING HERBS, WARNING TEXTS 80

BOOK I — CHAPTER X COMPACT AND ACCEPTANCE 87

BOOK I — CHAPTER XI LAYING THE GHOSTS 98

BOOK I — CHAPTER XII A KINDLY EPICURE 107

BOOK II 118

BOOK II — CHAPTER I MIDSUMMER SUNRISE 119

BOOK II — CHAPTER II _EUPHROSINE_, STAR-OF-COMFORT 123

BOOK II — CHAPTER III A QUEEN OF CURDS AND CREAM 134

BOOK II — CHAPTER IV OPEN-EYED CONSPIRACY 141

BOOK II — CHAPTER V EVIL PROMPTER, JEALOUSY 153

BOOK II — CHAPTER VI THE PERFECT ROSE, DROOPING 165

BOOK II — CHAPTER VII NODS AND WREATHÉD SMILES 173

BOOK II — CHAPTER VIII A GREY GOWN AND RED ROSES 180

BOOK II — CHAPTER IX A RIDER INTO BATH 190

BOOK III 195

BOOK III — CHAPTER I THE LITTLE MASTER OF BINDON 196

BOOK III — CHAPTER II TOTTERING LIFE AND FORTUNE 204

BOOK III — CHAPTER III STRAWS ON THE WIND 211

BOOK III — CHAPTER IV A SHOCK AND A REVELATION 216

BOOK III — CHAPTER V SILENT NIGHT THE REFUGE 223

BOOK III — CHAPTER VI THE LUST OF RENUNCIATION 232

BOOK III — CHAPTER VII SHADOWS OF THE HEART OF YOUTH 242

BOOK III — CHAPTER VIII THE HERB EUPHROSINE 250

BOOK III — CHAPTER IX AN OMINOUS JINGLE 258

BOOK III — CHAPTER X A VAGUE DESPERATE SCHEME 264

BOOK III — CHAPTER XI A PARLOUR OF PERFUME 271

BOOK III — CHAPTER XII TO SLEEP—PERCHANCE TO DREAM! 281

BOOK III — CHAPTER XIII THOU CANST NOT SAY I DID IT 293

BOOK III — CHAPTER XIV JEALOUS WATCHERS OF THE NIGHT 304

BOOK III — CHAPTER XV A SIMPLER’S EUTHANASIA 314

BOOK III — CHAPTER XVI THE TIME IS OUT OF JOINT 317

BOOK III — CHAPTER XVII TREACHERIES OF SILENCE 332

BOOK III — CHAPTER XVIII GONE LIKE A DREAM 341

BOOK III — CHAPTER XIX GREY DEPARTURE 353

BOOK IV 361

BOOK IV — CHAPTER I AH ME, THE MIGHT-HAVE-BEEN! 362

BOOK IV — CHAPTER II A MESSENGER OF GLAD TIDINGS 371

BOOK IV — CHAPTER III NOT WORDS, BUT HANDS MEETING 380

BOOK IV — CHAPTER IV A DREAM OF WOODS AND OF LOVE 389

# Opening pages

THE STAR DREAMER

BY THE SAME AUTHORS

*By Egerton Castle*

YOUNG APRIL

THE LIGHT OF SCARTHEY

MARSHFIELD THE OBSERVER

CONSEQUENCES

ENGLISH BOOK-PLATES—Ancient and Modern (*Illustrated*)

SCHOOLS AND MASTERS OF FENCE. A History of the Art of the Sword from the Middle Ages to the Nineteenth Century. (*Illustrated*)

THE JERNINGHAM LETTERS. (*With Portraits*)

LE ROMAN DU PRINCE OTHON. A rendering in French of R. L. Stevenson's PRINCE OTTO.

*By Agnes and Egerton Castle*

THE PRIDE OF JENNICO

THE BATH COMEDY

THE HOUSE OF ROMANCE

THE SECRET ORCHARD

THE STAR DREAMER

INCOMPARABLE BELLAIRS. (*In the Press*)

[Illustration:

THE HERB-GARDEN

*An ancient gateway, looking as though it were closed forever ... and, through the bars, the wild, imprisoned garden....* ]

THE STAR DREAMER *A ROMANCE*

BY AGNES AND EGERTON CASTLE

*Authors of*

“THE PRIDE OF JENNICO,” “YOUNG APRIL,” “THE SECRET ORCHARD,” “THE HOUSE OF ROMANCE,” “THE BATH COMEDY,” ETC.

[Illustration]

NEW YORK FREDERICK A. STOKES COMPANY PUBLISHERS

*All rights reserved.*

PUBLISHED IN JANUARY, 1903.

TO LADY STANLEY (DOROTHY TENNANT)

HERSELF SO GRACIOUS AN IMPERSONATION OF GIFTED AND GENEROUS WOMANHOOD, THIS STORY OF A WOMAN’S INFLUENCE IS DEDICATED, IN ESTEEM, SYMPATHY, AND FRIENDSHIP, BY THE AUTHORS

*The haunting of the locked door, of the condemned apartment in a house of life and prosperity, how unfailingly it appeals to the romantic fibre! Yet, more suggestive still, in the heart of a rich and trim estate, is the forbidden garden jealously walled, sternly abandoned, weed-invaded, falling (and seemingly conscious of its own doom) into a rank desolation. The hidden room is enigmatic enough, but how stirring to the fancy this*

*peep of condemned ground, descried through bars of such graceful design as could only have been once conceived for the portals of a garden of delight!—Thus stands, in the midst of the nurtured pleasaunces of Bindon-Cheveral, the curvetting iron gate leading to the close known on the estate as the Garden of Herbs—a place of mystery always, as reported by tradition; and, by the legend touching certain events in the life of one of its owners, a place of somewhat sinister repute. Even in the eyes of the casual visitor it has all the air of*

*Some complaining dim retreat For fear and melancholy meet.*

*And in truth* (*being fain to pursue the quotation further*)

*I blame them not Whose fancy in this lonely spot Was moved.*

*Ancient haunts of men have numberless tongues for those who know how to hear them speak; therein lies the whole secret of the fascination that they cast, even upon the uninitiated. Those, on the other hand, whose minds are attuned to the sweetness of "unheard melodies" turn to such places of long descent with the joy of the lover towards his bridal chamber, for the wedding of fantasy with truth. Divers, indeed, and many, might be the tales which the walls of Bindon-Cheveral could tell, from what remains of its old battlements to the present mansion.*

*Its front, which the passer-by upon the turnpike-road may in leafless winter-time descry at the end of the long avenue of elms, has the peaceful and rich stateliness of the Jacobean country seat—but there is scarce a stone of its grey masonry, with its wide mullioned windows, its terrace balustrades and garden stairways, that has not once been piled to the arrogant height from which the Bindon Castle of stark Edward's times looked down upon the country-side. The towers and walls are gone; but the keep still stands, sleeping now and shrouded under centuries of ivy—a kindly massive prop to the younger house, its descendant. The ornamental waters were once defensive moats: red they have turned with*

*other than the sunset glow, and secretly they have rippled to different causes than the casting of a careless stone or the leap of the great fat carp after a bait. Where the pleasure-grounds are now stretched in formal Italian pride spread, centuries back, the outer bailey of the once famous, now forgotten, stronghold.*

*Stirring would be the Romance of old Bindon I could recount, as old Bindon revealed it to me—many the tales of love, of deeds, of hatred, of ambition. I could tell brave things of the builder of the Castle, and how he held the keep in defiance of Longshanks' royal displeasure; or of the Walter, Lord of Bindon, Knight of the Garter, High Treasurer to the last Lancaster, and of his fortunes between the Two Roses; or yet of his grandson, beheaded after Hexham; and, under Richard Crookback, of the transfer of the good lands of Bindon to the "Jockey of Norfolk" who perished on Bosworth Field.—And these would be tales of clash of steel and waving banner as well as of wily diplomacy. Great figures would stalk across my page; it would be shot with scarlet and gold, royal colours; and high fortunes, those of England herself, would be mingled with the lesser doings of knight and baron.*

*I could set forth the truth touching some of those inner tragedies, now legendary, that the warlike walls once witnessed after the first Tudor had restored the estate of Bindon to the last descendant of its rightful owner, a Cheveral, whereby the line of Bindon-Cheveral joined on the older branch.—There was the Agnes Cheveral of the ballad singers—"so false and fair"—who left the tradition of poison in the wine cup as a fate to be dreaded by the Lords of Bindon.—And there was the Sir Richard who kept his childless wife a life-long prisoner in the topmost chamber of that keep now so placidly dreaming under its creepers!*

*Or I could reel you a bustling Restoration narrative of the doing of the Edmund Cheveral known in the family as Edmund the Spendthrift, who had roamed England, hunted and fasting, with Charles; had stagnated*

*with him, had junketed and roystered in Holland. He it was who brought over the shrewish little French wife and her great fortune, and also foreign notions of display, to old English Bindon. He it was who pulled down the gloomy loopholed walls, built the present House, laid out the park and the renowned gardens; who introduced the carp into the pacific moat after the fashion of French châteaux; and who, bitten with fanciful scientific aspiration—a friend of Rupert and a member of the Royal Society—laid out in a sunken and wall-sheltered part of the old fortified ground an inner pleasaunce of exotic plants and shrubs, after the manner of Dutch Physick-Gardens.*

*Or would you have the story of the new heir—a silent, dark man—and of his mystic Welsh wife and of the new wealth and strain of blood that came with her into the race? Or again, no doubt for those who care to hear the call of horn and hounds, to see the port pass over the mahogany; who find your three-bottle man the best company and the jokes of the stable and of the gun-room the only ones worth cracking with the walnut, there were a pleasant rollicking chapter or two to be chronicled anent the generation of fox-hunting, hard-living Squires who kept Bindon prosperous, made its cellars celebrated and its hospitality a byword.*

*And yet, my fancy lingers upon the spot where it was first awakened; dwells on the story of the deserted Physick-Garden, with its closed exquisitely-wrought gate, its mystery and its melancholy; with its wildness wherein lies no hint of sordidness, but rather a fascinating, elusive beauty. It is of this that I fain would write.*

*Standing barred out, in this still autumn twilight, as the first stars flash out faintly on the deepening vault; gazing upon its overgrown paths, where the leaves of so many summers make rich mould; inhaling its strange fragrances, the scent of the wholesome decay of nature mixed with odd spices that come from far lands; hearing the wild birds cry as*

*they fly free in its imprisoned space—it seems to me as if the spirit of my romance dwelt in these, and I could evoke it.*

*A tale of well-nigh a century ago; when George III. lay dying.—It was a strangely silent Bindon then; and the whole house seemed to lie under much such a spell as now holds its Herb-Garden. Yet those same garden paths, if wild, were not deserted; and the gate, though locked to the world at large, still rolled upon its hinges for one or two who had the key.*

*In those days of slow journeys and quick adventure, had you been a traveller on the turnpike-road between Devizes and Bath, you could not, looking over the park wall from your high seat, but have been struck by the brooding, solitary look that lay all upon this great House, with its shuttered windows and upon these wide lands, so rich, yet so lonely.*

*The driver of the coach would, no doubt, have pointed with his whip; his tongue would have been ready to wag—was not Bindon one of the wonders of his road?*

"*Aye, you might well say it looked strange! There were odd stories about the place, and odd folk living there, if all folk said were true. The owner, Sir David Cheveral (as good blood as any in the county, and once as likely a young man as one could wish to see), had turned crazy with staring at the stars and took no bit nor sup but plain bread and water. That was what some said; and others that he was bewitched by an old kinsman of his that lived with him—an old, old man, bearded like a Jew, who could not die, and who practised spell-work on the village folk. That was what others said. Anyhow, they two lived in there quite alone; one on his tower, the other underground. And that was true. And the flowers bloomed in the garden, and the fruit ripened on the walls; there were horses in the stables and cattle in the byres (the like of which could not be bettered in Wiltshire); the whole place was flowing with milk and honey, as they say, and the only ones to use it all were the servants! Oh,*

*there the servants grew fat and did well, while the master looked up to the skies and grew lean.*"

*And presently, to the sound of your driver's jovial laugh the coach would bowl clear of the long grey walls, emerge from under the overhanging branches; and then the well-known stretch of superb scenery suddenly revealed at the bend of the road would perhaps so engross your attention that your transient traveller's interest in the eccentric, world-forsaking master of Bindon-Cheveral would no doubt have evaporated.*

*But pray you who travel with me to-day give me longer patience. I have to tell the story of Bindon's awakening.*

THE STAR DREAMER

# BOOK I

Thy soul was like a star and dwelt apart. WORDSWORTH (*Sonnets*).

THE STAR DREAMER

# BOOK I — CHAPTER I FAIR, YOUNG, CAPABLE HANDS

## CHAPTER I FAIR, YOUNG, CAPABLE HANDS

Alone and forgotten, absolutely free, His happy time he spends, the works of God to see In those wonderful herbs which here in plenty grow, Whose sundry strange effects he only seeks to know, And choicely sorts his simples got abroad, And dreams of the All-Heal that is still on the road.... —DRAYTON (*Polyolbion*).

On that evening of the autumnal equinox Master Simon Rickart—the simpler or the student as he liked to call himself, the alchemist as many held him to be—alone, save for the company of his cat, in his laboratory at the foot of the keep, was luxuriating as usual in his work of research.

The black cat sat by the wood fire and watched the man.

As Master Simon moved to and fro, the topaz eyes followed him. When he spoke (which he constantly did to himself, under his voice and disjointedly, after the wont of some solitary old people) they became narrowed into slits of cunning intelligence. But when the observations were personally addressed to his Catship, Belphegor blinked in comfortable acknowledgment. “As wise as Master Simon himself,” the country folk vowed: and indeed, wherever the fame of the alchemist had spread through the country-side, so had that of the alchemist’s cat.

There were two fires in the laboratory. One of timber, that roared and crackled its life away and sank into an ever increasing heap of fair white ash. In the vault-like room this fire burned year in year out on a hearth hewn many feet into the deep wall; and from many points of view Belphegor found it vastly more satisfactory than the other fire, which

generally engrossed the best of his master's attention. That was a stealthy red glow, nurtured on a wide stove built into another wall recess, sheltered behind a glass screen under a tall hood:—a fire productive of the strangest smells, at times evil, but as often sweet and aromatic: a fire also productive on occasions of coloured vapours and dancing flamelets of suspicious nature. There, as the cat knew, happened now and again unexpected ebullitions, disastrous alike to the nerves and to the fur. In his kitten days, Belphegor, led ostensibly by overpowering affection but really by the constitutional curiosity of his genus, had been wont to accompany his chosen master behind the screen. He knew better now. And there was a bald spot near the end of his tail, where no amount of licking on his part, no cunning unguent of Master Simon's himself could to this day induce a hair to grow again.

The old man had closed the door of the stove; rearranged, crown-like, a set of glass vessels of engaging shapes: alembics and matrasses, filled with decoctions of green and amber, gorgeous colours shot with the red reflection of the fire; tucked a baby-small porcelain crucible in its fireclay cradle and banked the glowing cinders around it. The touch of the wrinkled hands was neat, almost caressing. After a last look around, he emerged, blowing a breath of content:

"Everything in good trim, so far, for to-night's work, my cat."

And Belphegor blinked both eyes.

Faint vapours, herb-scented, voluptuous, rose and circled to the groined roof. The log fire on the hearth had fallen to red stillness. In the silence, delicate sounds of bubbling and simmering, little songs in different keys, gurgles as of fairy laughter, became audible.

"Hark to it!" said the simpler, and bent his ear with a smile of satisfaction. He spoke in a monotonous undertone, not unlike the muttering of the sleep-walker—"Hark to it! There is a concert for

you—new tunes to-night, Belphegor. Strange, delightful! There is not a little plant but has its own voice, its own soul-song. Hark, how they yield them up! Good little souls! Bad little souls, some of them, he, he! Enough in that retort yonder to make helpless idiots, or dead flesh of a hundred lusty men. Dead flesh of eleven such fine cats as yourself and one kitten, he, he! Yet—for properly directed, friend Belphegor, vice may become virtue—enough here to keep the fever from the homestead for three generations....”

The old man moved noiselessly in his slippers across the stone floor, flung a couple of fresh logs on the sinking hearth, then stretched out his frail hands to the blaze and laughed gently. The flame light played fantastically on his shrunken figure:—a being, it would seem, so ætherealised that it scarcely looked as if blood could still be circulating beneath that skin, like yellow ivory, tensely stretched over the vast, denuded forehead and the bold, high-featured face. Mind alone, one would have thought, must animate that emaciated body; mind alone light up those steel-blue eyes with such keenness that, by contrast with the age-stricken countenance, they shone with almost unearthly vitality.

The cat stretched himself, yawned; then advanced, humping his back and bristling, to rub himself against his master’s legs. The fire roared again in the chimney, a score of greedy tongues licking up the last drops of sap that oozed forth, hissing, from the beech logs.

“Aha,” said Master Simon, bending down somewhat painfully to give a scratch to the animal’s neck, “that’s the fire-song you prefer. I fear, I fear, Belphegor, you will never rise beyond the grossest everyday materialism!”

Purring Belphegor endorsed the opinion by curling up luxuriously on his head and stretching out his hind paws to the flame. The little scene was an allegory of peace and comfort. The old man, straightening himself, remained awhile musing:

“Well, it is good music—a song of the people. All of the stout woods of Bindon, of the deep English earth, of the salt English airs. No subtle virtue in it: a roaring good tune, a homely smell and a heap of ash behind—but all clean, my cat, clean!”

He gathered the folds of his dressing-gown around him; a garment that had once been wondrous fine and set in fashion (in the days of his elegant youth) by no less a person than his present Majesty, King George IV., but now so stained, so singed and scorched and generally faded, that its original hues were but things of memory.

“And now we shall have a quiet hour before supper. What a good thing, my cat, that neither you nor I are attractive to company! The original man was created to be alone. But the fool could not appreciate his bliss, and so he was given a companion—a woman, Belphegor, a woman!—and Paradise was lost.”

Again Master Simon chuckled. It was a sound of ineffable content, weirdly escaping through the nostrils above compressed lips. He took up a lighted candle, stepped carefully over the cat and, selecting between his fingers a key from a bunch at his girdle, approached a wooden press that cut off an angle of the room.

This was built of heavily carved black oak, secured with sturdy iron hinges; had high double doors and small peeping keyholes, suggestive of much cunning. It was a press to receive and keep secrets. And yet, when the panels were thrown open, nothing of more formidable nature was displayed than rows upon rows of inner drawers and shelves, the latter covered some with philosophical instruments, others displaying piles of neatly ticketed boxes, ranks of phials, and sealed tubes of various liquids or crystals that flashed in the light with prismatic scintillation.

Holding the candle above his head the old man selected:

“The box of Moorish powder from Tangiers—the bottle of Java Water—the paste of *Cannabis Arabiensis*—the *Hippomane Mancenilla* gum of Yucatan.”

He placed the materials on a glass tray and carried them over to the working table.

“Excellent Captain Trevor! The simple fellow has never done thanking me for curing him of his West Coast fever with a course of *Herba Betonica*; he, he! the common, ignored, humble Wood Betony. Thanking me—he, he! Never did a pinch of powder bring better interest...! Oh, my cat, I’m a mass of selfishness! And here I have at last the Java Water and the Yucatan gum!”

The cat roused himself, walked sedately but circuitously across the room, leaped up and took his position with feet and tail well tucked in on the bare space left, by right of custom, where the warmth of the lamp should comfort his back.

On Master Simon’s table lay a row of small covered watch-glasses, thin as films, each containing a small heap of some greenish crystalline powder. A pair of chemical scales held out slender arms within the walls of its glass case. The neat array looked inviting.

With a noise as of rustling parchment the simpler rubbed his hands; he was in high good humour. The tall clock at the end of the room wheezed out the ghost of nine beats, and the strangled sounds seemed but to point the depth of the environing silence. For the thick walls kept out all the voices of nature, and at all times enwrapt the underground room with a solemn stillness that gave prominence to its whispers of secret doings.

“Nine o’clock!” muttered the self-communer. “Another hour’s peace before even Barnaby break in upon us with his supper tray. Hey, but this is a good hour! This is luxury. I feel positively abandoned! Not a soul in this whole wing of Bindon, save you and me—unless we reckon our

good star-dreamer above—good youth with his head in the clouds. Heigh ho, men are mostly fools, and all women! Therefore wisely did I choose my only familiar—thou prince of reliable confidants."

The man stretched out his hand and caressed the beast's round head. Belphegor tilted his chin to lead the scratching finger to its favourite spot.

"Hey, but man must speak—it is part of his incomplete nature—were it only to put order in his ideas, to marshall them without tripping hurry. And you neither argue nor contradict, nor give a fool's acquiescence. You listen and are silent. Wise cat! Now, men are mostly fools ... and all women!"

Master Simon lifted the phial of Java Water, a fluid of opalescent pink, between his eye and the light. He removed the stopper and sniffed at it. Then compared the fragrance with that of the Moorish powders, and became absorbed in thought. At one moment he seemed, absently, on the point of comparing the tastes in the same manner, but paused.

"No, sir, not to-night," he murmured. "We must keep our brain clear, our hand steady. But it will be an experiment of quite unusual interest—quite unusual.... I am convinced the essential components are the same.—Belphegor! Keep your nozzle off that gallipot! Do you not dream enough as it is?"

He pushed the turn-back cuffs still further from his attenuated wrists, and with infinite precaution addressed himself to the manipulation of his watch-glasses, silver pincers and scales: the final stage of weighing and apportioning the result of an analytical experiment of already long standing was at hand.

His great white eyebrows contracted. Now, bending close, he held his breath to watch the swing of the delicate balance; now with fevered fingers he jotted notes and figures. At times a snapping hand, a clacking

tongue, proclaimed dissatisfaction; but presently, widening his eyes and moistening his lips, he started upon a fresh clue with renewed gusto.

The clock had ticked and jerked its way through the better part of the hour when the weird muttering became once more audible:

“Curious, curious! Yet it works to my theory. Now if these last figures agree it will be proof. Pshaw, the scales are tired. How they fidget! Belphegor, my friend, down with you, the smallest vibration would ruin my week’s work. Down! Now let us see. As seventy-three is to a hundred and twenty-five ... as seventy-three is to a hundred and twenty-five.... A plague on it!” exclaimed Master Simon pettishly, without looking up. “There’s that Barnaby, of course in the nick of wrong time!”

The door at the dim end of the room had been opened softly. A puff of wood smoke had been blown down the chimney. A tiny draught skimmed across the table; the steady lamplight flickered and cast dancing shadows; and Master Simon’s tense fingers trembled with irritation.

“All to begin again. Curse you, Barnaby! You’re deaf, I can curse you, thank Providence!”

Without turning round he made a hasty, forbidding gesture of one hand. The door was shut as gently as it had been opened.

Master Simon gave a deep sigh, and still fixedly eyeing the scales, stretched his cramped hands along the table for a moment’s rest.

“Now, now? Ha—Ho—What? Sixty-nine to eighty-two? Impossible! Tchah! Those scales have the palsy—nay, Simon Rickart, it is your impotent hand. Old age, old age, my friend ... or stormy youth, alas!” His muttering whisper rose to louder cadence. “Had you but known then, in your young folly, the chains you were forging, for your aged wisdom! But sixty to-day, and this senile trembling! Not a shake of that hand, Simon, but is paying for the toss of the cup; not a mist in that brain but is

the smoke of wanton, bygone fires. Well vast is the pity of it! Had you but the hand now of that dreamer up above! Had you but the virtue of his temperate life! And the fool is staring at his feeble twinklers ... worshipping the unattainable, while all rich Nature, here at hand, awaits the explorer. Oh, to feel able to trace Earth mysteries to the marrow of Man; to hold the six days' wonder in one single action of the mind ... and to be foiled at every turn by the trembling of a finger!"

He leaned back in his chair, long lines of discouragement furrowing his face.

Behind him, in the silence, barely more audible than the simmering sounds of the fires and the lembics, there was a stir of another presence, quiet, but living. But Master Simon, absorbed in his own world of thought, perceived nothing.

With closed eyes, he made another effort to conquer the rebellious weakness of the flesh and bring it into proper subjection to the merciless vigour of the mind. At that moment the one important thing on earth to the old student was the success of his analysis. And had the Trump of Doom begun to sound in his ears, his single desire would still have been to endeavour to conclude it before the final crash.

Light footfalls in the room—not caused by Belphegor's stealthy paws, certainly not by Barnaby's masculine foot—a sound as of the rustle of a woman's garments, a sound unprecedented for years in these consecrated precincts, failed to reach his faculties. Once more he drew his chair forward, leant his elbows on the table, and, stooping his head so that eyes and hands were nearly on the same level, set himself to the exasperatingly delicate task of minute weighing. And the while he muttered on with a droll effect of giving directions to himself:

"The right rider, half a line to the right. That should do it this time! Too much—bring it back! Faugh, out of all gear! Too much back now. Fie,

fie, confusion upon my spinal cord—nerves, muscles, and the whole old fumbling fabric!"

Here, two hands, with unerring swoop like that of an alighting dove, came out of the dimness on each side of the bent figure, and with cool, determined touch gently withdrew the old man's hot and shaking fingers from their futile task.

Master Simon's ancient bones shook with a convulsive start; a look of intense amazement passed into his straining eye, then the faintest shade of a smile on his lips. But, characteristically, he never turned his head or otherwise moved: the business at hand was of too high import. He sat rigid, silently watching.

The interfering hands now became busy for a space with soft unhurried purpose. Beautiful hands they were, white as ivory outside and strawberry pink within, taper-fingered and almond-nailed; not too small, and capable in the least of their movements. Compared to those other hands that now lay, still trembling in pathetic supineness, where they had been placed, they were as young shoots, full of vital sap, to the barren and withered branch. A woman's warm presence enfolded the student. A young bosom brushed by his bloodless cheek. A light breath fanned his temples. A scent as of lavender bushes in the sun, of bean fields in blossom, of meadowsweet among the new-mown hay; something indescribably fresh, an out-of-door breath as of English summer, spread around him, curiously different from the essences of his phials and stills. But Master Simon had no senses, no thought but for the work those busy hands were now performing.

"The right rider, to the right, just half a line?" said a voice, repeating his last words in a tranquil tone. "A line—those little streaks on the arms are lines?"

Master Simon assented briefly: "Yes."

The fingers moved.

“Enough, enough!” ordered he. “Now back gently till the needle swings evenly.”

The pulse of the scales, hitherto leaping like that of a frightened heart, first steadied itself into regularity and then slowed down into stillness. The long needle pointed at last to nought. The white hands hovered a second.

“Not another touch!” faintly screamed the old man.

He craned forward, his body again tense; gazed and muttered, wrote and rapidly calculated.

“Yes, yes, yes! Seventy-three to a hundred and twenty-five—I was right—Eureka! The principles of the two are the same. Right! Right!”

Now Simon Rickart, rubbing his hands, turned round delightedly.

# BOOK I — CHAPTER II A MASS OF SELFISHNESS

## CHAPTER II A MASS OF SELFISHNESS

... Such eyes were in her head; And so much grace and power, breathing down From over her arch'd brows, with every turn Lived thro' her to the tips of her long hands.... —TENNYSON (*The Princess*).

"Well, Father?"

Master Simon started. His eyes shot a look of searching inquiry at the young woman who now came round to the side of the high table, and bent down to bring her fresh face to a level with his.

"Ellinor? Not Ellinor, not my daughter...!" he said.

"Ellinor. The only daughter you ever had. The only child, as far as I know!"

The tranquil voice had a pleasant, matter-of-fact note. The last words were pointed merely by a sudden deep dimple at the corner of the lips that spoke them. But it was trouble, amounting to agitation, that here took possession of the father. He pushed his chair back from the table, rubbed his hands through his scant silver locks, tugged at his beard.

"You've come on ... on a visit, I suppose?" he said presently, with hesitation.

"I have come to stay some time—a long time, if I may."

"But—Marvel, but your husband?"

"Dead."

The dimple disappeared, but the voice was quite unaltered. She had not shifted her position.

“Dead?” echoed Master Simon. His eyes travelled wonderingly from her black stuff gown—a widow’s gown indeed—to the head with its unwidow-like crown of hair; to the face so youthful, so curiously serene, so unmournful.

Her hands were lightly clasped under the pointed white chin. Here the father’s eyes rested; and from the chaos of his disturbed mind the last element of his surprise struggled to the surface and formulated itself into another question:

“Where is your wedding ring?”

“I took it off.”

Ellinor Marvel straightened her figure.

“Father,” she said, “we have always seen very little of each other, but I know you spend your life as a searcher after truth. Since we are now, as I hope, to live together, you will be glad to take notice from the first that I have at least one virtue: I am a truthful woman. It will save a good deal of explanation if I tell you now that, when the coach crossed the bridge this evening and I threw into the waters of the Avon the gold ring I had worn for ten miserable years, I said: ‘Thank God!’”

Simon Rickart took a stumbling turn up and down the room: his daughter stood watching him, motionless. Then he halted before her and broke into a protest, by turns incoherent, testy, and plaintive.

“Come to stay—stay a long time! But, this is folly! We’ve no women here, child, except the servants. David wants no women about him. I don’t want any women about me! There’s not been a petticoat in this room since you were last here yourself. And that, that’s ten years ago. You will be very uncomfortable. You have no kind of an idea of what

sort of existence you are proposing to yourself. I am a mass of selfishness. I should make your life a burden to you. Be reasonable, my dear! I am a very old man. Pooh, pooh, I won't allow it! You must go elsewhere. Hey, what?"

"I cannot go elsewhere, I have no money."

"No money! But Marvel! But the fortune I gave you? Tut, tut, what folly is this now?"

"Gone, gone—and more! He would have died in the Fleet had we not escaped abroad. The guineas I have now in my purse are the last I own in the world. All my other worldly goods are in the couple of trunks now in the passage." She stopped, and remained awhile silent, then in a lower voice and slowly: "Look at me, father," she added, "can I live alone?"

He looked as he was bidden. He, the man who had not always been a recluse, the whilom man of the world who in older years had taken study as a hobby, the man of bygone pleasures, appraised her ripe woman's beauty with rapid discrimination. Then into the father's eyes there sprang a gleam of something like pride—pride of such a daughter—a light of remembrance, a struggling tenderness. The next moment the worn lids fell and the old man stood ashamed:

"I beg your pardon, my dear," he said, gravely, and sank into his chair.

She came round and looked down at him a moment smiling.

"You never heard me walk all about the room," she said, "I have a light tread. And I'll always wear stuff dresses here." Then, more coaxingly: "I don't think you'll find me much in the way, father. I've got good eyes, I am remarkably intelligent"—she paused a second and, thrusting out her hands under his brooding gaze, added with a soft laugh: "And you know I've steady hands!"

He stared at the pretty white things. Faintly he murmured:

“But I’m a mass of selfishness!”

“Then I’ll be the more useful to you!” she cried gaily and laid first her cool, young cheek, then her warm, young lips upon his forehead.

The sap was not yet dead in the old branch, after all. Master Simon’s body had not become the mere thinking machine he fain would have made it. There was blood enough still in his old veins to answer to the call of its own. Memories, tender, remorseful, all human, were still lurking in forgotten corners of a brain consecrated, he fancied, wholly to Science; memories which now awoke and clamoured. Slowly he stretched out his hand and touched his daughter’s cheek.

“Poor child!”

Ellinor Marvel now drew back quietly. Master Simon passed a finger across his eyes and muttered that their light was getting dim.

“The lamp wants trimming,” she said, and proceeded to do it with that calm diligence of hers that made her activity seem almost like repose. But she knew well enough that neither sight nor lamp was failing; and she felt her home-coming sanctioned.

At this point something black and stealthy began to circle irregularly round her skirts, tipping them with hardly tangible brush, while a vague whirring as of a spinning-wheel arose in the air. She stepped back: the thing followed her and seemed to swell larger and larger, while the whirrs became as it were multiplied and punctuated by an occasional catch like the click of clockwork.

“Why, look father!”

There was a gay note in her voice. Master Simon looked, and amazement was writ upon his learned countenance.

“Belphegor likes you!” he exclaimed, pulling at his beard. “Singular, most singular! I have never known the creature tolerate anyone’s touch but my own or Barnaby’s.”

Hardly were the words spoken when, with a magnificent bound, Belphegor rose from the floor and alighted upon her shoulder—at the exact place he had selected between the white column of the throat and the spring of the arm—and instantly folded himself in comfort, his great tail sweeping her back to and fro, his head caressing her cheek with the touch of a butterfly’s wing, his enigmatic eyes fixed the while upon his master. Ellinor laughed aloud, and presently the sound of Master Simon’s nasal chuckle came into chorus. He rubbed his hands; he was extraordinarily pleased, though quite unaware of it himself.

Ellinor sat on the arm of his winged elbow-chair—his “Considering Chair,” as he was wont to describe it—and looked around smiling.

“Still at the same studies, father? How sweet it smells in this room! It looks smaller than I remember it. I once thought it was as big as a cathedral. But I myself felt smaller then. How long ago it seems! And what is that discovery that I came just in time for?”

Master Rickart engaged willingly enough in the track of that pleasant thought.

“Why, my dear, simply that an old surmise of mine was right. Ha, ha, I was right.... The active principle of *Geranium Cyanthos* with the root of which, as Fabricius relates—Fabricius, the great Dutch traveller and plant-hunter—the Kaffir warlocks are said to cure dysentery.... It is positively identical with a similar crystalline substance which I have for many years obtained from *Hedera Warneriensis*—the species of ivy that grows about the ruins of Bindhurst Abbey, of which mention is made by Prynne....”

Thus he rambled on with the selfish garrulity of the old man in the grip of his hobby; presently, however, he fell back to addressing himself rather than his listener, and gradually subsided into reflectiveness. And once more silence drew upon the room.

# BOOK I — CHAPTER III RUSTLING LEAVES OF MEMORY

CHAPTER III RUSTLING LEAVES OF MEMORY

... The garden-scent Brings back some brief-winged bright sensation Of love that came and love that went. —DOBSON (*A Garden Idyll*).

Long drawn minutes, ticked off by the slow beat of the laboratory clock, dropped into the abysm of the past.

Master Simon, sunk in his chair, his head bent on his breast, had fallen into a deep muse. His eyes, fixed upon the face of his daughter—fair and thrown into fairer relief by Belphegor's black muzzle nestling close to it—had gradually gathered to themselves that blank, unseeing look which betrays a mind set upon inner things.

Ellinor sat still, her shapely hands folded on her lap. She was glad of the rest, for this was the end of a weary journey. She was glad, also, of the silence, which gave room to her clamourous thought.

Home again! The only home she had ever known. For those last ten years seemed only like one hideous, interminable voyage in which she, the unwilling traveller, had been hurried from port to port without one hour of rest.

To this house of peace, encircled by a triple ring of silence—the great walls, the still waters of the moat, and the vast, stately park with its mute army of trees—she had first been brought at so early an age that any recollections of other hearth or roof were as vague as those of a dream-world. But vivid were the memories now crowding back of her

former life here—memories of rosy, healthy childhood.—Aunt Sophia's kind, foolish face and her indulgent, unwise rule. Baby Ellinor rolling again on the velvet sward and pulling off the tulip blossoms by the head; child Ellinor ranging and roaming in stable and farm, running wild in the gardens.... Nearly all her joys were somehow mingled with gardens; with the rosary in the pleasure-grounds, which she roamed every day of the summer; with the old kitchen garden, where she devoured the baby-peas and the green gooseberries; with the Herb-Garden—the mysterious, the strictly forbidden, the alluring Herb-Garden, her father's living museum of strange plants!

Between high walls it lay: a long, narrow strip, running down to the moat on one side and abutting to the blind masonry of the keep on the other. Here her father—an ever more remote figure, and for some reason unintelligible to her child's mind, ever more detached from the common existence of the house, took his sole taste of air and sunshine. How often, peeping in through the locked iron gates, she had watched him, with curiosity and awe, as he passed and re-passed amid the rank luxuriance of the herbs and bushes, so absorbed in cogitation that his eyes, when they fell upon the little face behind the bars, never seemed to see it.—The Herb-Garden! Naturally, this one spot (where, it seemed, grew the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil) had a vastly greater attraction for the small daughter of Eve than the paradise of which she had the freedom. Aunt Sophia had warned her that the leaf of any one of those strange herbs might be death! Yet visit the Herbary she often did, all parental threats and injunctions notwithstanding, by a secret entrance through the ruins of the keep.

Strange that her thoughts should from the very hour of her return home hark back so much to the Herb-Garden! No doubt there was suggestion in all the sweet smells floating now around her. She thought she recognised *Camphire* and *Frangipanni*; but there were others too, known yet

nameless; and they brought her back to the fragrant spot, the delights of which had so long been forgotten.

Her memories were nearly all of solitary childhood. Sir David, the young master of Bindon, the orphan cousin to whom Simon Rickart was in those days humourously supposed to play the part of guardian, entered but little into them, and then only as a grave Eton boy, disdainful of her torn frocks, of her soiled hands, her shrill joyousness. He and his sister Maud kept fastidiously aloof.... Maud of the black ringlets and the fine frocks, who from the first had made her little cousin realise the gulf that must exist between the child of the poor guardian and the daughter of the House.

But later came a change.

She was Miss Ellinor—a tall maiden, suddenly alive to the desirableness of ordered locks and pretty gowns; and young Sir David began to assume importance within her horizon. How these fleeting memories, evoked by the essence of Master Simon’s distilling, were sailing in the silence of the room round Ellinor’s head!

It was during his University years. The young master brought into his house every vacation an extraordinary stir of eager life. There came batches of favoured companions, varying according to the mood of the moment:—youthful philosophers who had got so far beyond the most advanced thought of the age as to have lost all footing; or exquisite young dandies, with lisps and miraculously fitting kerseymere pantaloons and ruffles of lace before which Miss Sophia opened wide mouth and eyes; or again, serious, aristocratic striplings of earnest political views.

During these invasions Aunt Sophia suddenly developed a spirit of prudence quite unknown to her usual practice, and Miss Ellinor, much to her disappointment, was kept studiously in the background. Upon this head cousin David entered suddenly into the narrow circle of her

emotions. Chafing against the unwonted restraint, Ellinor one day defied orders, and boldly presented herself at the breakfast-table while her cousin and two young men of dazzling beauty, all in hunting pink and buckskins, were partaking of chops and coffee under the chaste ægis of Miss Sophia Rickart's ringlets.

How well Ellinor could recall the startling effect of her entrance. She had walked in with that boldness which girlish timidity can assume under the spur of a strong will. Miss Sophia had gaped. Three pairs of eyes were fixed upon the intruder. David's serious gaze, always so enigmatic to her. Then the Master of Lochore's red-brown orbs.—They were something of the colour of his auburn hair. She had come under their range before, and had hated them and him upon a sudden instinct, all the more perhaps for the singular attachment which David was known to have found for him.—The third espial upon her was one of soft, yet piercing blackness: she was pulled-up in her would-be nonchalant advance as by an invisible barrier. David, long and lean in his red and white, had risen and come across to her with great deliberation. He had taken her hand.

"Cousin Ellinor," he had said, in a voice of most gentle courtesy, "you have been misinformed: Aunt Sophia did not request your presence."

He had bowed, led her out across the threshold, bowed again, and closed the door. There had been a shout from within, expostulation and laughter. And she, without, had stamped her sandalled foot and waited to hear no more. With tears of bitter mortification streaming down her cheeks she had rushed to her beloved old haunt in the Herb-Garden, carrying with her an odious vision of her cousin's face as it bent over her; of his grave eyes, so strangely light in contrast with the dark cheek; of the satirical twist of his lips and the mock ceremony of his manner.

But she had taken with her also another vision; and that was then so consoling that, as she marched to and fro among the fragrant bushes that were growing yellow and crisp under autumn skies, she was fain to let

her mind dwell lingeringly upon it. It was the black broad stare of surprised admiration in young Marvel's eyes.

Many a time, in the subsequent days, did the walls of the forbidden gardens enfold her in their secrecy—but not alone. He of the black eyes had heard of the secret entrance and was by her side many a time—Aye, and many a time, in the years that followed, had Ellinor told herself, in the bitterness of her heart, how far better it would have been for her then to have sucked the poison of the most evil plant that had clung appealingly round her as she brushed by, listening to young Marvel's wooing.

Those were days of courtship: an epidemic of sentiment seemed to have spread through Bindon. Handsome, ease-loving, bachelor parson Tutterville developed a sudden energy in the courtship which had stagnated for years between him and Aunt Sophia, on whose round cheeks long-forgotten roses bloomed again.

And David too! From one day to the other Sir David Cheveral had received, it seemed, fair and square in his virgin heart, virgin for all the brilliant and fast life he seemed to lead, the most piercing dart in Love's whole quiver. He was one of those with whom such wounds are ill to heal. Poor David!

In the prevailing atmosphere he of the black eyes had got his own way easily enough. Marriage bells were the music of the hour. Parson Tutterville led the way to the altar with Miss Sophia's ringlets drooping upon his arm. Ellinor promptly followed, with lids that were not easily drooped cast down under the blaze of the drowning black stare. Ellinor the child, confident little moth throwing her soul against the first alluring flame, to its torture and undoing!

Well, all that was past! She had revived. She was back at the door of life, stronger and wiser. But David? David was also alone. After scaling to the

pinnacle of the most exalted, devouring passion, he had had to go down into the valley again, alone, carrying the sting in his heart. Alone, always, she had heard. Poor David!

“No!—Happy David,” said Ellinor aloud.

# BOOK I — CHAPTER IV BACK AT A NEW DOOR OF LIFE

## CHAPTER IV BACK AT A NEW DOOR OF LIFE

Joy's recollection is no longer joy While sorrow's memory is sorrow still! —BYRON (*Doge of Venice*).

"Eh?" said the old man.

He fixed his gaze once more upon his daughter, and stared at her for a moment as if her comely presence were but some freakish play of his own senses.

"Father?"

The knotted wrinkles became softened into an unwilling smile.

"I spoke aloud, didn't I?" said she. "It must be an inherited trick! I was thinking of David. He never thought more of marriage?"

"Marriage!"

"Will he never marry, father?"

"David, marry! Oh, pooh! David, wise man, has consecrated his youth to his pursuit. Pity, though, he did not choose a more satisfactory one!"

Mrs. Marvel lifted Belphegor from her shoulders to the floor and drew her chair closer.

"You mean his star-gazing? He sits in his tower all night, peering at the skies, 'and dreams all day, like an owl.' That's what Willum said when I questioned him just now. Do you also call his a foolish pursuit?"

“He’s a visionary, a dreamer,” answered the other testily. “A splendid mind, the vigour of a young brain ... and to waste it on the stars, on distant worlds with which no telescope can ever bring him into any useful contact, from which no nights of study, were he to live as long as Methuselah, will ever enable him to gain one single grain heavy enough to weigh down that scale there, that scale which as you saw, will not even bear a breath unmoved! And all this world, child, all this world!” In his enthusiasm the old man had risen and now was pacing the room. “This teeming, inexhaustible world of ours, full of marvellous, most subtle secrets yet submissive to our investigation, from the mass that blocks out our horizon to the tiniest atom that, even beneath this glass,”—he was now by his work-table and his fingers caressed the microscope—“is scarce visible to the eye, all obedient to the same laws and amenable to our ken! With all these treasures at his hand, awaiting him, he throws away his life on the unattainable, on the stars, on moonshine!”

The faded dressing-gown flapped about the speaker’s lean legs as he walked; his white hair swung lightly over his bent shoulders.

Ellinor looked after him with eyes of amusement.

“The short of it,” said she, “is that he prefers his telescope to your microscope.”

“Fancy to fact, girl! Dreams to reality! Speculation to uses! Ah, what should we not have done, we two, had he been willing to work down here instead of up there!”

With a growl Master Simon returned to his sweet-smelling furnace and began mechanically to feed the fires with charcoal. She heard him mutter, as if to himself:

“Work with me? Why, I hardly ever even see him! David’s a ghost, rather than a man—a ghost that rises with the evening shades and disappears at dawn; that never speaks unless you charge him!”

Ellinor remained silent a while, pondering. Presently she said, in the voice of one who sees in what to others seems incomprehensible a very simple proposition:

“He lives, it would appear, uplifted in thoughts beyond the sordid things of earth. He knows no disillusion, for the unattainable star will never crumble to ashes in his hand. He will never see of what ugly clay the distant and glorious planet may, after all, be made! I say: happy David ... not to have married his first love.”

“Tush! Don’t you believe that David ever thinks of love.”

He made an impatient motion with the bellows and cast over his shoulder a look of severity, of surprise that a person who had shown herself capable of managing the rider on his scale should endeavour to engage him in the discussion of such trivialities in this appallingly short life.

Their glances met. It was his own spirit that looked back to him, brightly defiant, out of eyes as brilliant and as searching as his own, and as blue.

“These things, these unconsidered trifles of hearts and hopes and sorrows, they’re quite beneath notice, are they not, father? You know no more of the woman that drove poor David to the top of his tower—the David I remember was not a recluse—than you did of the dashing, handsome youth to whom you handed over your only child ... that she might live happy ever after!”

The widow laughed. But it was with a twist of her ripe, red mouth and a harsh sound like the note of an indignant bird.

The old man, remained arrested for a space, stooping over the stove with the bellows poised in his hand, as if the meaning of her words were slowly filtering to his brain. Then, letting his implement fall with a little clatter, he shuffled back towards his daughter and stood again gazing at her, his lips moving noiselessly, his eye dim and troubled. Master

Simon's mind, trained to such alertness in dealing with a certain set of ideas, groped like that of a child in the endeavour to lay hold of the new living problem.

At length he put out a trembling finger and timidly laid it for a second on her hand. She looked up at him with an altered expression, infinitely soft and womanly.

"I am afraid," said he quickly, as if ashamed of the breakdown of his own philosophy, "I am afraid you have suffered, my girl."

"I never complained while it lasted," she answered. "I shall not complain now that it is over."

He gathered the skirts of his gown more closely about him and regarded her from under his shaggy eyebrows with an expression of deadly earnestness in singular contrast with his appearance.

"You spent long nights in tears, child, longing for the sound of his step?"

"How do you know?" she answered, flashing at him.

"Your mother did," he sighed.

There fell a heavy pause, during which Belphegor sang with the simmering phials a quaint duet as fine as a gossamer thread.

"Until the morning dawned, when I dreaded the sound of that step," said the widow at last.

Master Simon frowned more deeply. New wrinkles gathered on his countenance.

"A worthless fellow! A wastrel, a gambler, a reprobate! And you doing your wife's part of screening and mending, nursing and paying. Aye, aye, I know it all. It was your mother's fate."

"And did my mother get cursed for her pains, and struck?"

The old man started as if the word had indeed been a blow.

“Ah, no,” he cried sharply. “Ah, no, not that, never that!”

Ellinor came close and laid her hands on his shoulders.

“Bad enough, God knows,” he repeated, shaking his head. “Heedless and selfish—but that, never!”

She looked at him, long and tenderly. When she spoke her tones and words were as full of deliberate comfort as her touch.

“Father,” she said, “compare yourself no more to that man. Your mind and his—what his was—are as the poles asunder. My mother’s life and mine, as Heaven and Hell. I did my duty to the end: whilst he lived, I lived by his side. He is dead—let him be forgotten! Life, surely, is not all bitterness and ashes,” she added a little wistfully. Then, with a return of brightness: “I have come back to you. I don’t know what I should have done if I had not had you. But here I am. This is the opening hour of my new life!”

The clock, in its dumb way, struck the hour of ten.

“Surely, father,” said Ellinor suddenly, “one of your little pots is rocking!”

There was a spirt of aromatic steam, in the midst of which white head and golden head bent together over the furnace; and young eyes and old eyes, so strangely alike, were fixed upon the boiling mysteries of the pharmacopic experiment. An adroit question here, a steadying touch there of those admirable hands and Master Simon, forgetting all else, began to direct and once more to explain—explain with an eager flow of words very different indeed from his disjointed solitary talk.

Chemistry or alchemy—how were the whimsical old student’s laboratory pursuits to be described? Chemist he was undoubtedly, by exactness of

knowledge; but alchemist, too, by the visionary character of his scientific enthusiasm, though he himself derided the suggestion.

“Powder of projection? Nonsense, nonsense!” he would have cried. “Not in the scheme of our world. Much use to mankind if gold became cheaper than lead!... Elixir of Life? Again preposterous! Given birth, death is Nature’s law.... But pain and premature decay—ah, there opens quite another road!—that is the physician’s province to conquer. And if one seeks but well enough for the *panacea*, the *universal anodyne*, the true *nepenthes*, eh, eh, who knows? Such a thing is undoubtedly to be found. Doubtless! Have we not already partially lifted up the veil? *Opium* (grandest of brain soothers!) and *Jesuit’s Bark* and the *Ether* of Frobœnius, and Sir Humphry’s *laughing gas*! Yet those are but partial victors; the All-Conqueror has yet to be discovered.”

Such a discovery Master Simon (who was first of all a botanist) had settled in his mind was to be made in the veins of some plant or other; and, therefore, with all the ardour of the student of mature years racing against Time, he now devoted all his energies to this special branch of investigation. Hence, perhaps the forgotten title of “simpler” was the most appropriate to this follower of Boerhaave and Hales. In the absorbing delight of his hobby he was given to experiment recklessly upon himself as well as upon others, after the method of that other fervent student of old, Conrad Gessner; and whatever the result, noxious or beneficent, he generally found in it confirmation of some theory.

“If the juices of certain herbs can produce melancholia, or the fury of madness, or idiocy, why should we not find in others the soothing of oblivion, or the stimulus to exalted thought, or the spur of genius? Why not,” he would say, “But life’s so short, life’s so short....”

The door was opened noiselessly. Barnaby, the *famulus*, clutching the tray, stood staring, open mouthed, in upon them.

“Hang that boy!” said Master Simon testily and, pretending not to notice the interruption, proceeded with his disquisition on the admirable things he meant to extract from Camphire or Henne-weed.

“Is that all they give you for supper, father?”

She had walked up to the tray which had been deposited on a corner of the table.

“A jug of ale!” she exclaimed with disfavour. “Small-ale—and sour at that, I’ll be bound!” She poured a few drops into the tumbler, sipped and grimaced. “Pah! Bread—heavy and yesterday’s. Cheese! Last year’s, I should say—and simply because the mice wouldn’t have any more of it!” Indignation rose within her as she compared this treatment of her father with memories of Bindon’s hospitality in bygone days. “And an apple!” she added, with scathing precision.

“Most wholesome,” suggested the simpler, deprecating interference.

“Wholesome!” she snorted. “Upon the theory of the dangers of over-eating, I suppose! And what a jug—what a tumbler!”

“Barnaby is rather clumsy,” apologised his master. “Apt to break a good deal. So I, it was I, begged Mrs. Nutmeg to provide us with stout ware.”

“What old Margery!—old Margery Nutmeg still here!” A shadow fell upon Ellinor’s face—the next moment it was gone. “Ugh! How I always hated that woman! I had forgotten all about her. It is a way I have: I forget the unpleasant! Well!” with a laugh, “now I understand. But I’ll warrant her well-cushioned frame is not supported upon the diet of wholesomeness meted out to you! Heavens! but what is this dreadful little mess in the brown bowl?”

“Belphegor’s supper,” answered his master with rebuking gravity.

“They treat him no better than they do you, father!”

She paused, took the edge of the tablecloth between her taper finger and thumb and thrust out a disdainful lip.

“What a cloth! Not even quite clean!”

“Mrs. Nutmeg has limited us. Barnaby has an unfortunate propensity for upsetting things,” humbly interposed the philosopher.

“Then Barnaby, whoever he is, ought to be soundly trounced,” asserted Mrs. Marvel.

She wheeled round on the boy, who still stared at her with round eyes—but her father laid an averting hand upon her arm.

“Hush,” he said, inconsequently lowering his voice, “the poor lad is deaf and dumb.”

“Deaf and dumb, your servant?”

Fresh amazement sprang to her face, succeeded by a lightening tenderness.

“He suits me, child,” cried the old man, hurriedly. “Pray do not attribute to me any foolish philanthropy, I’m a——”

She interrupted him with a gay note:

“A mass of selfishness, of course—Who could doubt it, who knew you an hour? Well, I am a mass of selfishness, too. Oh, I am your own daughter, as you’ll discover for yourself very soon! And such frugality as Master Simon is made to practise will never suit Mistress Ellinor. Can your appetite for these, these wholesome things, bide half an hour, father?”

Without awaiting the answer, she placed Belphegor’s portion on the floor, handy to his convenience, then whisked up the tray, bestowed a

nod and a radiant smile upon Barnaby (that made him her slave from henceforth) and briskly left the room. Barnaby automatically followed.

Master Simon rubbed his bald head and tugged at his beard. Belphegor was stamping on the hearth rug with a monstrous hump and bristling tail, preparatory to addressing himself to his supper.

“So here we are, with a female about us after all, my cat! But she seems an exceptionally reasonable person—quite a remarkable woman.”

His eye fell on the notes of his experiment, and a crinkling smile spread upon his countenance. “There is something about the touch of a woman’s hand,” he murmured, and promptly became absorbed again.

“I have not been very long, have I?” said Ellinor, when in due course she returned, followed by Barnaby with a tray.

The student lifted his hand warningly without withdrawing his eyes from his array of figures.

“Never fear,” said she, “your table shall be sacred.”

She fetched a large round stool and motioned to Barnaby to deposit his burden thereon. It was a tray of mightily increased dimensions, graced with damask (a little yellow, perhaps, from the long hoarding, but fine and pure), laden with cut crystal, with purple and gold china. The light of a pair of silver candlesticks gleamed on the red of wine, on the flowery whiteness of bread, on the engaging pink of wafer slices of ham and the firm primrose roll of a proper housewife’s butter.

“Shall we not sup?” said Mistress Marvel.

She poured into the diamond-cut glass a liquor of exquisite fragrance and colour, and placed it in her father’s hand. And, as he raised it to his lips almost unconsciously, a faint glow, like the spectre of the ruby in his glass, crept upon the pallor of his cheek.

“What is this?” he exclaimed, in interested tones, holding out the beaker to the light.

“Not small-ale!” laughed she. “Not small beer whatever it be! I have seen,” she added musingly, whilst her father contemplated her with astonishment, “I have seen strange things at Bindon since I arrived this evening, and could scarce obtain admittance in the unlit courtyard, (old watchman Willum recognised me, that was at least something). At the front door, dark, cold, forbidding, not one servant in attendance! I had to enter the house like a thief, by the back ways. It seems like a house under a spell! Ah, very different from the Bindon of old! But I have seen nothing stranger than the servants’ hall, whither Barnaby took me in silence—a good lad, your Barnaby,” and she cast a friendly glance over her shoulder at the still figure behind her. “I don’t know,” she resumed, taking up the fork, “whether they treat David as they treat you, his cousin, but they look well after themselves!”

She laughed, but a colour of anger had mounted again to her brow.

“Margery is away, it seems; so old Giles tells me. He was bringing up the wine for supper. Are you listening, father? Wine for the servants’ supper! And lighting these candlesticks! And if they consider cheese and ale good enough for you, do not think they misunderstand the meaning of good cheer. So we made the raid—and here you have some of their fare. Drink sir!”

# BOOK I — CHAPTER V QUENCHLESS STARS ELOQUENT

CHAPTER V QUENCHLESS STARS ELOQUENT

O, who shall tell what deep inspirèd things Thou speakest me, when, tranquil as the skies, O Night, I stand in shadow of thy wings, And with thy robe of suns fulfil mine eyes! —E. SWEETMAN (*The Star-Gazer*).

It is no unusual thing for a man whom human love has betrayed and left bare; whose life some violent human passion has robbed of all savour, to turn for consolation to the things of heaven. This is what, in course of time, had befallen Sir David Cheveral, when his youthful dream of happiness had fled before a bitter awakening. But the heaven to which he had turned was not that “Realm beyond the Stars” pictured by the faith of ages, but that actual region above and about our globe, as mysterious a world, perhaps, and as little heeded by the bulk of mankind; that immensity peopled by other suns and earths, ruled by a harmony so vast and grandiose that the thought of centuries is but beginning to grasp it; that universe of space and time, as unfathomable to our finite groping senses and as appealing to imagination and reason both as any realm of eternity pictured by the poets of any creed!

The worlds outside the earth, then, seemed for years to have given to his desolate spirit, gradually and absorbingly, all that the world of earth has in different ways to give to man.

The dome of heaven was David Cheveral’s mistress. To his phantasy, a mistress ever variable and ever loved; whether chastely remote, ridden by the fine silver crescent, emblem of virginity; or passionate, low-brooding,

full-mooned and crimson, pregnant with autumn promise; or yet high and cold, in winter magnificence, sparkling with the jewels that are beyond dreams of splendour; or yet again veiled and indifferent; or stormy, cloud-wracked with the anger of the gods; condescending now with exquisite intimacy, anon passing as irrevocably as Diana from her shepherd. Who that had once loved such a mistress could ever turn back to one of earth again? So thought the star-dreamer of Bindon.

And this esthetic passion was at the same time his art and his life-work. It filled not only heart, but mind. Endless was the lesson to be learned, opening the road endlessly to others; untiring the labour to be expended; his own the genius to divine, to grasp, to translate; and his also every gratification, every reward! So thought the star-dreamer. He had drifted into a life of study and contemplation as solitary men drift into eccentricity; and if in its all absorbing tendency there lurked madness of a sort, there was a harmonious method in it; and to him, at least (precious boon!), it spelt peace of soul.

Every day's work of such a study meant a fresh conquest of the mind, noble and peaceful. Mighty conceptions unfolded themselves to an ever-soaring intellect and thrust back more and more the pigmy doings of this small earth into their proper insignificance. Meanwhile his sight was rejoiced with beauty ever renewed. The music of the spheres played its great harmonies to his fastidious ear; the rhythm of a universal poetry, too exquisite to find expression in mere words, settled upon a mind ever attuned to vastness, till the drab miseries of humanity seemed well-nigh fallen away, and the petty fret of everyday life, the chafing, the disillusion, the smart of pride, the cry of the senses, were as forgotten things.—His soul was filled with visions.

Now on this evening, while Master Simon in his laboratory underground was being called by unexpected claims from his own line of abstraction,

something equally startling had occurred to Sir David Cheveral in his observatory.

He was pacing his airy platform on the top of the keep, under an exquisite and pensive sky of most benign charity. Never had he felt himself more uplifted to the empyrean, more detached from a sordid world, than at the beginning of this watch. Deep beyond deep spread the blue vasts above him. As the lover knows the soul of his beloved, so his vision, unaided, pierced into the heart of mysteries that even through the telescope would be veiled to the neophyte.

Upon her moonless brow this autumnal night wore a coronal of stars that might have shamed her later glories. The Heavenly Twins and Giant Orion beginning the southward ascent in splendid company; Aldebaran, fiery-red eye of the Bull; the tremulous pearly sheen of the Pleiades; the grand, upright cross of Cygnus, planted in the very stream of the Milky Way, and, slowly sinking towards the West, the gracious circlet of the Northern Crown—when had Night's greater jewels shone with more entrancing lustre upon the diaper of her endless lesser gems!

David Cheveral turned from one field of beauty to another; anon reckoning his treasures with a jealous eye, anon letting the vast beauty mirror itself in his soul as in a placid pool.

But rapture is ever tracked by fatigue: it seems to be an envious, miserly law of our finite nature that every spell of exaltation must be paid for by despondency. Melancholy is but the weariness either of mind or of body: often of both. The airs were variable and cold, and food had not passed his lips for many hours; yet he had no conscious hankering for the warm hearthstones beneath him; no conscious desire for the touch of a fellow hand or the sound of a human voice. But, by slow degrees there crept upon him an unwonted and profound sadness.

A familiar catch-phrase of Master Simon's:—"And life's so short! and life's so short!"—had begun to haunt his thoughts, to whisper in his ear, lulled though it was by the voice of solitude. A sense of his own limitations before this illimitable began to oppress him. So much beauty and but one sense with which to possess it: but weak mortal eyes and an imperfect vision, inferior even to that of many an animal! To feel within oneself the intellect, the power to conceive the creations of a God, and to know that one's ignorance was still as vast as the field of knowledge offered ... the pity of it! With every gracious night such as this to glean a little more of the rich harvest—and life so short that, were one to live a cycle beyond the allotted span, the truth garnered in the end would be but as motes glinting here and there in floods of light!

Such revolts give way to lassitude. The useless "Why?" is inevitably succeeded by the "*Cui bono?*"

The astronomer who was too much of a poet—the star-dreamer, as men called him—drew a deep sigh. He had been tempted from his self-allotted task of calculation as a lover may be tempted to dally in adoration of his beloved. He now turned to go back to his table, but as he did so was once more arrested in spite of himself by the fascination of the great dome.

As it is the desire of man to possess what he finds most beautiful, so is it the instinct of the poet, of the painter, of the musician, to express and give again to the world the captured ideal.—The pain of impotency clutched at the dreamer's heart.

But of a sudden he started; his sad eyes became alert and fixed.—An event that happens but at rarest times in the history of human observation had taken place under his very gaze.

A new gem had been added to the splendours of the heavens!

His languid pulses beat quicker. He passed his hand across his brow; no, it was not the overworked student's hallucination! Did he not know every aspect of the constellation, of the evening, of the hour? Sooner might a woman miscount her jewels, a collector his treasures, than he misread the face of his idol! It was no fancy. There, above the Northern Crown, a new star—a fire of surpassing radiance had flashed out of his sky even at the moment of his looking.

He had seen it suddenly blossoming, as if it were into his own garden, like a magic flower from some hidden bud. An unknown light had pulsed into existence where darkness hitherto had reigned.

A new star had been born! His soul caught up the fire of its brilliance. It was as if his transient faithlessness had been beautifully rebuked; his faintness of heart driven forth by a glance of his beloved's eyes. Nay, it was as if, in some fashion, his mystic espousal had brought forth life. To him had been given what is not given to man once in a cycle—to receive the first flash of a world!

Inexpressibly stirred, filled with enthusiasm, he hurried to his instruments and with eager hand turned the great lenses upon the apparition.

Out of the chasm of those inconceivable spaces—from the first contemplation of which, it is said, the neophyte recoils with something like terror—broke, swirling, the splendour of a star where certainly no star had ever been seen before. *His star!* Breaking from the darkness, it sailed across the field of his vision, radiant, sapphire, gorgeously, exquisitely blue!

To every man who lives more in the spirit than in the flesh there come moments when the *afflatus* of the gods seems to descend upon him; moments of intuition, inspiration or hallucination, when he sees things not revealed to the ordinary mortal. What, in his sudden exalted mood,

David Cheveral saw that night was never vouchsafed to him again. It was beyond anything he could ever put into words; almost, in saner moments, he shrank from putting it into thought.

When at length he descended from his altitudes and touched earth again, though still as in a trance, he entered a record of the discovery on his chart. Every student of the heavens knows that a new star is oftener than not temporary and may fade away as mysteriously as it has blazed forth. His next care, although it was against his habits to invite the company of his fellow creature, was instinctively to seek another witness to the event.

However man may cut himself adrift from his kin, the impulses of his nature remain ever the same in critical moments. A joy is not complete until it is shared; a triumph is savourless until it is acclaimed.

He was still dazed from the strain of watching, from the gloom of the black tower stairs and of the long unlit passages when he reached the basement rooms that were Master Simon's province at Bindon.

Pushing open the heavy oaken door, he stood a moment looking in.

There was cheerful candle-gleam where he was wont to find dimness; a gay sound of laughter and words where silence used to reign; and instead of Master Simon's bent grey head, there rose before his sight, haloed with light, so white and pure as almost to seem luminous itself, a young forehead set in a radiance of crisp, fiery-gold hair. His eyes encountered the beam of two unknown eyes, exquisitely blue. Blue as his star!

And he thought he still saw visions; thought that his star had as suddenly and sweetly taken living shape here below as above in the unattainable skies.

# BOOK I — CHAPTER VI EYES, BLUE AS HIS STAR

## CHAPTER VI EYES, BLUE AS HIS STAR

——Dwelt on my heaven a face Most starry-fair, but kindled from within As 'twere with dawn! —TENNYSON (*The Lover's Tale*).

On the new-comer's entrance Ellinor looked up. The smile was arrested on her lips and her eyes grew grave with wonder: there was something curiously unsubstantial, something almost fantastic in the man that stood thus, framed in the gaping darkness of the doorway.

That pale head, refined to ætherealisation, with its masses of dense, black hair; that straight figure, unusually tall and seeming taller still by reason of its exceeding leanness, romantically draped in the folds of a sable-lined cloak; above all, those eyes, under penthouse brows, singularly light and luminous in spite of their deep-setting, gazing straight at her, through her and beyond her—the eyes of the dreamer, or rather of the seer! In her surprise she failed for the moment to connect with this apparition the forgotten identity of the "cousin David" she had known in her girl days; the smooth-cheeked lad—dandy, fox-hunter, poet, politician—but in every phase, image of assertive and satisfied youth.

Master Simon broke the spell of the singular moment.

"Ah, David," quoth he, "dazed—moonstruck as usual? Awake, good dreamer, awake! There have been fine happenings here below while you were frittering God's good time, blinking at your stars!"

He rose from his seat and shuffled round the table with quite unusual alertness. A glass of the vintage served to him by his daughter had

brought a transient fire into the sluggish veins. As he tapped David on the arm, the latter turned his abstracted gaze upon him with a new bewilderment: the bloodless simpler, with a pink glow upon his cheek, with skull-cap rakishly askew on his bald head, with a roguish gleam in his usually keenly-cold eye—unwonted spectacle!

“We’ve done great things to-night,” repeated the old gentleman excitedly. “That experiment, David, successfully carried through at last! It is exactly as I surmised—you remember? The Geranium of the Hottentot, Fabricius’ plant and our Ivy here—contain the same principle! Ah, that was worth finding out, if you like!”

His bony fingers beat a triumphant tattoo on David’s motionless arm.

“What do you say to that?” insisted Master Simon.

The astronomer was still silent. The light in his eyes had faded; but they brightened again when he brought them back upon Ellinor. This time, however, they were less distant, less dreamily amazed, more humanly curious.

“And I have drunk wine,” pursued Master Simon. An unctuous chuckle ran through his ancient pipe. “Ichor from the veins of a noble plant, *Vitis Vinifera*, David, compounded of dew and earth juices, sublimated by sunshine.... Beautiful cryptic processes!” He paused, closed his eyes over the inward vision, and then added with solemn simplicity: “It is chemically richer, that’s obvious, I may say it is altogether superior as a cerebral stimulant to table-ale. That was her opinion.” He jerked his thumb in the direction of Ellinor. “And I endorse it.... I endorse it. She——”

“She?” interrupted Sir David. His voice was deep and grave, and Ellinor then remembered vaguely that even as a child she had liked the sound of it. A new flood of old memories rushed back upon her; she rose to her feet and came forward quickly, stretching out both her hands:

“Cousin David, don’t you know me?”

“To be sure,” cried her father gaily, “I have been extremely remiss. This is Ellinor, our little Ellinor. Shake hands with Ellinor. She’s come to stay here. So she says.”

He stopped upon the phrase and pulled at his beard, flinging a quick, doubtful look at the master of the house. “I told her we, neither of us, are good company for women that—in fact, it is impossible for thinking men, such as we are, to have a high opinion of her sex, but”—he waved his arm with a magisterial gesture—“I have already discovered, and you know my diagnoses are habitually correct, that my daughter is an unusually intelligent, sensible person, and that we might no doubt both benefit by her company.”

“If cousin David will allow me to stay,” said Ellinor gently.

She was standing quite motionless in the same attitude, her hands outstretched, bending a little forward, her face slightly uplifted—for tall as she was she had to look up to meet her cousin’s eyes. Repose was so essentially one of her characteristics, that there was nothing suggestive either of awkwardness or of affectation in this arrested poise of impulsive gesture.

The heavy cloak fell from David as he unfolded his arms and, hardly conscious of what he was doing, slowly took both her hands. Her fingers closed upon his in a grasp that felt warm and firm.

“That’s right,” said Master Simon. “Why, you were big brother and little sister in the old days. Kiss her David.”

The magic Burgundy was still working wonders; for the moment this old fantastic being had gone back thirty years in geniality, in humanity. “Kiss her, David,” he repeated.

The dark and pale face of Sir David, severe yet gentle, bent over Ellinor.

Half-laughing, half-startled, yet with a feminine unwillingness to be the one to attach importance to a cousinly greeting, she turned her cheek towards him. But the kiss of the recluse, was—she never knew whether by design or accident—laid slowly upon her half-opened, smiling lips.

Had anyone told Ellinor Marvel who, during four years had cried at love and during six years more had railed at it, that her heart would ever be stirred in the old, sweet mad way because of the touch of a man's lips, she would, in superb security, have scorned the suggestion. Yet now, when she turned away, it was to hide a crimsoning face and a quickening breath.

Nay, such a flutter, as of wild birds' wings, was in her breast, that she vaguely feared it could not escape the notice even of Master Simon's happy abstractedness.

When she again looked at his kinsman, she found that he had been pressed into a chair beside hers; and that her father, with guileless hospitality, was forcing upon his host a glass of his own choice vintage.

But, as she looked, she thought she could note a flush, kindred to her own, slowly fading from David's forehead, and, in the hand he extended passively for the glass, ever so slight a trembling. The next moment she was full of doubt: his reserve seemed complete, his presence almost austere. And she blushed again, for her own blushes.

As if to a silent toast, Sir David drained the goblet; then turning his eyes upon her:

"You are welcome, Ellinor," he said.

The young widow started at the words, and her discomposure increased. There occurred to her for the first time a sense of the strange position in which she had placed herself; of her impertinence in thus coolly announcing her intention of taking up her residence at Bindon, without

even the formality of asking its owner's leave. But after listening a while to the disjointed conversation that now had become engaged between her father and David, the quaintness and sweetness of the relationship between the two men—the unconscious manner in which such whole-hearted hospitality was bestowed and received without any sense of obligation on one side, or of generosity on the other, struck her deeply, and brought at once a smile to her lips and a mist to her eyes.

"To every law there are special exceptions," remarked Master Simon, sententiously. "David may be quite convinced that I should not have entertained the idea of permitting any ordinary young person of the opposite sex to take up her abode under our studious roof. But a few moments have convinced me, as I said before, that Ellinor may be classed among the abnormal—the abnormal which, as you know, David, can be typically represented as well by the double-hearted rose as by the double-headed calf." He paused to enjoy the conceit, then insisted: "Represented, I say, by the beautiful no less than by the monstrous."

"By the beautiful indeed," echoed the astronomer.

Ellinor glanced at him quickly. But his gaze, though fixed upon her eyes, was so abstracted, that she could not take the words to herself.

Altogether her cousin's personality baffled her. He had not been one minute beside her, before, in her woman's way, she had noted every detail of his appearance; noted, approved, and wondered.

This recluse, indeed, seemed to bestow the most fastidious care on his person. At a glance she had marked the long, slender hands, white and shapely, the singularly fine linen, the fit and texture of the sombre clothes of a past mode that clung to his spare, but well-knit limbs. The contrast between this choiceness, which would not have misfitted a dandy of the Town, and his dreamer's countenance offered a problem which was undoubtedly fascinating.

There was also something of pride of blood in her approval of his high-bred air; and, at the same time, a sufficient consciousness of the remoteness of their kinship to make the memory of his lips upon hers a troubling one. Added to this, there was a baffling impression in the atmosphere of apartness from the world which enwrapped him. His eyes—what did they see as they looked at her so long, so straight? Not the living Ellinor: no man could so look on a woman, as man on woman, without passion or effrontery! Not once had he smiled. With all his courtesy—a courtesy that sat on him as becomingly as his garments—hardly had he noticed her ministration to plate or glass. The carelessness, also, with which he accepted her arrival, without an inquiry as to its cause, without the smallest show of interest in her past and present circumstances, stirred her imagination, whilst it vexed her vanity.

“I believe,” she thought, “he has even forgotten I have ever been married. Nay I vow,” thought she, a little amused, a good deal piqued, “it is a matter of serene indifference to cousin David whether I be maid, wife, or widow!”

“Ellinor, my girl,” said the old man, pushing his plate from him, “this sort of thing is well enough for once in a way, and more particularly as my work, thanks to your timely assistance, is concluded for the night. But I must not be tempted to such an abandonment to the appetites another evening!”

“Very well, father,” answered she demurely, while a dimple crept out, as she surveyed his unfinished slice of ham and the fragments of his bread.

“As to the wine,” pursued he, “it is another matter. I will not deny that wine, producing this pleasant exhilaration (were it not accompanied by the not disagreeable langour which I now feel, and which is the result of my own self-indulgence) might stimulate the brain to greater lucidity than does the usual liquor provided by Mrs. Nutmeg. It is quite possible,” he went on, leaning back in his chair while the lamplight played on the

shrunken line of his figure, on the silver beard, and the diaphanous countenance. “It is quite possible that even as the plant requires sun-rays to produce its designed colour, so the veins of man may require this distillation of sun-heat and sun-light to liberate to the utmost his potential forces. David, we may both be the better of this drinkable sunshine!”

As he spoke, he meditatively sipped and gazed at the glass which his daughter had unobtrusively refilled.

The astronomer had been crumbling the white bread and eating and drinking much in the same frugal and half unconscious manner as the simpler; it seemed as if spirits so attuned to secluded paths of thought could scarce condescend to notice the material needs.

But upon Master Simon’s last remark, Sir David put down his beaker.

“Drinkable sunshine!” he cried, the light of the enthusiast leaped into his eye. He rose from the table as he spoke. “Ah, cousin Simon, I have this night drunk into my soul its fill of creating light.”

“Pooh! With your cold stars,” scoffed the simpler, once more eyeing the gorgeous colour of the wine against the light.

“The sun that raises from the soil and vivifies your plants, that gives the soul to the wine you are drinking, is one of the lesser stars,” said the astronomer gravely. “The countless stars you deem so cold are suns—I have to-night watched the birth of a new distant world of fire.”

“Ah,” commented the other, calmly scientific. “A phenomenon, like Ellinor here, rare, but possible.”

“I came down to tell you, to bring you back with me to see it,” David continued, and Ellinor could detect the exaltation of his thoughts in manner and voice. “Come, master of the microscope and of the test-tube, come and see the new star. Come and witness such a wonder as those microscopes, those crucibles will never show you.”

“My good young friend,” exclaimed the aged student, “while you, through your astrolabes, watch the revolving, the fading and growing of systems which you can neither control nor make use of, I, through those second eyes and those regulated fires, not only learn for the great benefit of science at large, the workings of the atoms that absolutely rule, nay, compose all life here below, but I can direct and guide them in one direction, neutralise or stimulate them in another, make them in short bring good or evil to humanity. I delight my own brain, but I also benefit the vast, suffering body of my kind.”

“The body, the body!” repeated the other, at once sweetly and contemptuously but still with the fire in his eye.

On his side Master Simon chuckled and rubbed his hands over his irrefutable arguments.

Then Sir David said again, almost as if he had not before proffered the request:

“Come, cousin, I want you to look at my new star.”

“Not I,” laughed Master Simon, tossing down the last drop of his second glass with the quaintest air of “abandonment,” wrapping his faded gown about him and folding himself in it as in a mantle of luxurious egotism. “Not I? Shall I spoil all these excellent impressions and bring my poor old bones back to a sense of age and infirmity by dragging them up your cold stairs to the top of your tower, there to stand in your draughty box and let all the winds of heaven find out my weak points—for the pleasure of gaping at a speck of light than which this lamp here is not less handsome, while immeasurably more useful? No, Sir David!”

Ellinor laid her hand upon her cousin’s arm.

“May I come?”

She spoke upon the true feminine impulse which cannot bear to see the avoidable disappointment inflicted; a feeling which men, and wisely, cultivate not at all in their commerce with each other.

David, again back in spirit with the heavens, turned upon her much the same look he had given her upon his first entrance. Then, as he stood a second, to all outward appearance impassive and detached, a curious feeling as of the realisation of some beautiful dream took possession of his senses. The fragrant breath of the distilled and sublimated herbs, "yielding up their little souls, good little souls!" in aromatic dissolution, filled his nostrils as with an extraordinary meaning. The sound of his kinswoman's voice, the touch of her hand, the subtle, out-of-door freshness of her presence in this warm room—all these things struck chords that had long been silent in his being. And the glance of her eyes! It was as blue as his star!

He took her fingers with a certain grace of gesture, born it might be of the forgotten minuets of his adolescent days, and prepared to lead her forth. But at the door he paused.

"As your father says, it is cold upon my tower."

So speaking, he placed upon her shoulders his own cloak of furs. And, as he drew the folds together under her chin, their eyes met again. She looked very young and very fair. For the first time that evening he smiled.

"Big brother and little sister!" he said.

Now, for some reason which at the moment Ellinor would stoutly have refused to define even to herself, the words were in no way such as it pleased her to hear from his lips. But the smile that lit up the darkness and austerity of his countenance like a ray of light, and altered its whole character into something indescribably gentle, went straight to her heart and lingered there as a memory sweet and rare.

Master Simon watched the door close upon them with an expression at once humourous and philosophically disapproving. Belphegor, sharpening his claws on the hearthrug, glanced up at his master with a soundless mew, as after all these distractions and disturbances the well-known quiet muttering fell again upon the air.

“I took her for the *rara avis*,” said the old man to himself, “but, I fear me, what I thought at first was the black swan may prove but a little grey goose after all! handmaid to that poor loony, with his circles and degrees as to assist me—me! And after displaying such an intelligent interest, too ...! Alas, my cat, ’tis but a woman!”

# BOOK I — CHAPTER VII NEW ROADS UNFOLDING

## CHAPTER VII NEW ROADS UNFOLDING

The stars at midnight shall be dear To her; and she shall lean her ear In many a secret place ... And beauty born of murmuring sound Shall pass into her face. —WORDSWORTH (*Lyrical Poems*).

The first hour which Ellinor spent with David, uplifted from the gloomy earth into the bosom of the night—they were so unutterably alone, amid the sleeping world with the great, watchful company of the stars!—was one, she knew, that would alter the whole course of her life; the pearly colour of which would thenceforth tint her every emotion.

Not indeed that one word, one touch, one look even of his could lead her to believe she had made on the man anything approaching the impression that she herself had felt. On the contrary, the apartness which had been noticeable even under the genial circumstances of the meal shared together in the light and warmth of Master Simon’s room became intensified when they entered the solitude, the mystic atmosphere of his high, silent retreat.

And yet she knew that she would not by one hair’s breadth have him different! In the whirlpool of the fast existence into which, like a straw, her young life had been tossed, there was not one man—even during that early period when “pinks” and “bucks,” undeniable gentlemen, were her husband’s faithful companions—but would have regarded the situation as an opportunity that, “as you live,” should be gallantly taken advantage of. But he—through the long passages of the house, up the narrow, winding stairs of the tower, he conducted her, for all his absent-mindedness, as a courtier might conduct his queen! When they

reached the platform of the keep, upon the threshold of the observatory she tripped up against some unnoticed step, and would have fallen had he not caught her in his arms. For an instant her bosom must have lain against his heart, the strands of her hair against his lips; and she honoured him for the simplicity with which he supported her and gave her his hand to lead her in.

A strange apartment, the like of which she had never dreamed, this chosen haunt of her strange kinsman! Wrapt in the sables that encompassed her so warmly, her eye wandered, from the dome with its triangular slit through which a slice of sky looked ineffably remote, to the fantastic instruments (or so they seemed to her) just visible in the diffuse light, with gleams here and there of brass or silver, or milky polish of ivory.

She watched him move about, now a shadow in the shadow, now with a white flicker from the lamp upon the pale beauty of his face. She listened in the deep night's silence, now to the inexorable dry beat of the astronomer's clock, now to the grave music of his voice, as he spoke words which, for all her comprehension of their meaning, might have been in an unknown tongue, and yet delighted her ear.

"There is the mural circle, and yonder my altazimuth. But what I wanted to show you is to be best seen in this, the equatorial."

Under his manipulation the machine moved with a magic softness of action—the domed roof turning with roll of wheels to let in upon them a new aspect of space. She reclined, as he bade her, on a couch. He adjusted the pointing of the mighty lens, and then she made her initiating plunge into the wonders of the skies.

First there came as it were upon her the great, black chasm before which the soul is seized with trembling, the infinitude of which the mind refuses to grasp—then a point of light or two—little fingers it seemed pointing to

the gulphs—then more and more, a medley of brilliancy, of colours, torch-red, flaming orange, diamond white, sailing slowly across the black field; then, dropping straight into her brain, like the fall of a glorious gem into a pool, carrying its own light as it comes—the blue glory of Sir David's new-born star.

Ellinor told herself, with a mingling of regret and pride, that since her soul had received the message of his star she understood David's vocation. And, however much she might wish in the coming days to draw him back to the homely things of earth, she could never be of those now who mocked or pitied.

A little later they stood upon the open platform together, and he pointed out to her the exact place of the marvel that had just been revealed to her. Again he spoke words of little meaning to her, yet fraught it seemed in their strangeness with deeper significance than those of a familiar language; but as she listened it was upon his transfigured countenance that all her wonder hung.

"See you, there, by Alphecca. Nay, you are looking at Vega of the Lyre-Vega the beautiful she is called: no wonder she draws your eyes! But lower them, Ellinor, and look a shade to the right. Turn to Corona, the Northern Crown."

With the abstraction of the enthusiast, he was quite unconscious that to her uninitiated ear the names could convey no sense, that to her uninitiated eye the aspect of the sky could show nothing abnormal.

"See, there, just to the right of Alphecca—oh, you see, surely, the most beautiful—my star, virgin to man, to the sight of this earth until to-night!"

Still as he looked upward, she looked at him.

The wind was blustering. The breath of the northwest had swept the heavens clear before bringing up its own phalanx of cloud and rain. The complaint of the great woods, far below their feet, rose about them; the thousand small voices of moving leaf and branch swelling like the murmur of a crowd into one pervading sound. Ellinor felt as if these voices of the earth were claiming her while the astronomer's ears were deaf.

Whilst they had remained within the observatory she had shared for a moment some of his own exaltation, heard the mysteries speaking to him, felt as if each star that struck her vision was in direct and personal communication with herself. But, once in the open air, as she leant over the parapet, this sense fell away from her. The heavens were chillingly remote, and remote was the spirit of their high priest and worshipper. Indeed he was gradually becoming oblivious of her presence.

After a prolonged silence she slipped out of his cloak and quietly placed it upon his own shoulders. He gathered the folds around him, crossed his arms with the gesture of the man who suffices to himself—all unconsciously, without even turning his eyes from their far-off contemplation.

And so she stole away from him—and sought her father once more. But finding him peacefully asleep in his high armchair, by a well-heaped fire and with the dumb *famulus* in attendance, she made her way through the deserted, silent house towards her own quarters, a little saddened in her heart, and yet happy.

A home-coming strange indeed, but strangely sweet.

With the quiet authority that so far had obtained for her all she wanted this evening, she had, on her arrival, bidden the only servant she could find prepare the chambers that had been hers in the old days. To these little gable-rooms, high perched in that wing of the house that connected

it with the ancient keep, she now at last retired. Candle in hand, she stood still a moment, holding the light above her head, and dreamily surveyed the place that had known the joyous hopes of her childhood. There was an odd feeling in her throat akin to a rising sob of tenderness.

Then she walked slowly round. It was like stepping back into the past; like awakening from a fever sleep of pain and toil.

Home—the reality! The rest was gone—over—of no more consequence than a nightmare! And yet, interwoven with this quiet sense of comfort and shelter, was an eager little thread of hope in the new, unknown life opening before her.

From her windows she could look up to the faint light of the observatory at the top of the black mass of the tower; and below it, she knew, the sheer depth of wall ran down into the dim spaces of the Herb-Garden. She gazed forth at the heavens. Never before this hour had she seen in its depths anything but the skies of night or the skies of day; now they were peopled with marvels. Never could they seem empty or commonplace again.

She watched for a moment, musingly, the rounded dome on the distant platform where to-night she had beheld so much in so short a time; where even now he was, no doubt still working at his lofty schemes. Then she tried to peer down through the darkness into her favourite haunt of old, the Herb-Garden—the garden of healing and poisons, where she had so disastrously plighted her young troth.

Shivering a little, for she was wearied with the long journey and the emotions of the day, and it was late, she drew back, closed the casements and sat down by the fire. The place was all strange, yet familiar. The little narrow, carved oak bed, the billowing feather quilt covered with Indian chintz by Miss Sophia’s own hands, nothing had changed in this virginal room after so many years but the occupant herself. There was the

armchair with the faded cushions, and there her own writing table with the pigeon-holes; aye, and the secret drawer where her lover's scrawling protestations had been deposited with trembling fingers....

The hand that wrote them—it had since been raised to strike her! And the precious missives themselves? All that was dust and ashes now; dust and ashes its memory to Ellinor. Yet it was not all a dream after all; and yonder stood the little cabinet, lest she forgot! It had a secret look, she thought, of slyness and mockery.

She pulled her seat nearer the hearth. A wood fire was sinking into red embers between the iron dogs. Leaning her elbows on her knees, she gazed at it, and mused, until the red faded to grey and the grey blanched into cold lifelessness.

It was not of the child, of the girl, of the unhappy wife that she now thought, but of the new roads that opened before the free woman—roads more alluring, more fantastic in their promise than even the ways in which her early fancy had loved to roam.

It was a change indeed from the sordid grey and drab atmosphere of her recent experiences, to be dwelling once more in this ancient mansion, the majestic interest of which she had before been too young to realise; to find herself adopted, with a simplicity that savoured more of the fairy tale than of these workaday times, accepted as their future companion by those two unworldly beings, the star-gazing lord of Bindon and his quaint guardian of old, the distiller of simples.

Yet it was not the thought of her father's odd figure and his venerable head and his droll sallies that occupied her mind with such absorbing interest as to make her forget the hour, the cold, and her fatigue; in truth it was the memory of the tall, fur-clad figure, of the white hand, and the luminous eyes, and the single moment of that smile. Again she felt upon

her lips the touch that had made her heart leap, and again at the mere thought flushed and shook.

# BOOK I — CHAPTER VIII WARM HEART, SUPERFLUOUS WISDOM

CHAPTER VIII WARM HEART, SUPERFLUOUS WISDOM

Of simples in these groves that grow He'll learn the perfect skill; The nature of each herb to know Which cures and which can kill.
—DRYDEN.

When the fame of her housekeeperly prowesses had gained for comely Miss Sophia Rickart the unexpected offer of parson Tutterville's hand and heart—the divine had taken this wise step after many years of bachelorhood and varied, but always intolerable slavery to "sluts, minxes, and hags"—like the dauntless woman she was, she resolved to prove herself worthy of the promotion.

Although her horizon had hitherto been bounded by duck-pond to the north and dairy to the south, still-room to the east and linen-cupboard to the west, she argued that one so admittedly passed mistress in the arts of providing for her neighbour's body need have little fear about dealing with the comparatively simple requirements of his soul! It was, therefore, after but a short course of study that she claimed to have graduated from the status of scholar to that of qualified expounder. Indeed, she was as pungently and comfortably stuffed with undigested texts and parables as her plumpest roast ducks with sage and onions.

Before long she began to consider herself, entitled by special grace of state, to interpret *in partibus* the will of the Almighty to less privileged individuals; and, in course of time, the enthusiastic spouse succeeded in taking the more trivial parish cares almost as completely off the parson's

hands as those of his household. What if, her flow of ideas being in excess of memory and understanding, the language of the Bindon prophetess were on occasions the cause of much secret amusement to the scholarly gentleman—one sip of her exquisite coffee was sufficient to re-establish the balance of things!

“Sophia’s texts will do the villagers quite as much good as mine,” he used to say, philosophically, and allow himself an extra spell with his Horace or his *Spectator*, whilst his wife sallied forth upon the path of war and mission.

With a large garden hat tied somewhat askew under the most amenable of her chins, with exuberant ringlets bobbing excitedly round her face, Madam Tutterville, as old-fashioned Bindon invariably called the parson’s lady—burst in upon Ellinor’s breakfast the morning after the latter’s arrival.

It was a day of alternate moods, now with loud wind voice and storm-tears lamenting, like Shylock, the loss of its treasures; now, like prodigal Jessica, tossing the gold shekels into space, making mock in sunshine of age and sorrow, recklessly hurrying on the inevitable ruin.

That Madam Tutterville had on her way been pelted with rain and buffeted with wind, her curls testified. But Ellinor, as she rose from behind her table by the open window, had the glory of a fresh sunburst on her hair and in her eyes.

She had left her bed early, full of brisk plans which concerned the greater comfort of her father’s life and were also to reach as far as her cousin’s tower. But even as she fastened the crisp ’kerchief round a throat that shamed the cambric with its living white, she had been handed a note from Master Rickart himself.

This was pencilled on a slip of paper, one half of which had obviously been devoted to some fugitive calculations, and which ran therefore in a curious strain:

MY DEAR GIRL,—Do not Ash: salts (50) : (20.1722...) attempt I beg of you, to disturb traces of sulphur but not me this morning. I shall be gaugeable Calcium as before in engaged on important work re- the ratio 7.171 5.32 quiring the undivided attention 7027.001 which solitude alone can secure. Mem. try in Val. foetida.

Ellinor read and was dashed, read again and laughed aloud.—Gracious powers what a pair of eccentrics had her relatives grown into!

But she was in high spirits, and hope rose in her heart. She was free from her chains; she was back from her exile, home in England, home in the dearest spot of that dear island! Her first outlook upon the world had been into the closes of the Garden of Herbs; and it had been to her as if the familiar face of a friend had looked back at her unchanged, yet full of promise. The beauty of the freshly-washed woods (still in their autumn coats of many colours: from russet to lemon-yellow, from the vermilion of the turning ash-leaf to the grey-white of the fir needle), she drew it all into her long-starved soul, even as she breathed in the wild purity of the air.

Therefore, as she had sat down to breakfast alone in the gay Chinese parlour where once Miss Sophia had reigned, the refrain of the song in her heart was an undismayed, nay, joyous: “Wait, my masters, wait!”

And therefore, also, as Madam Tutterville walked on to the scene of her past dominion she found a merry, hungry niece; and she was scandalised, for she had come armed with texts wherewith to console the widow.

“‘Him whom he loveth, he blasteth’!” she cried enthusiastically from the threshold, “‘aye, even to the third and fourth generation’—my afflicted Ellinor...!”

She stopped, stared, her manner changed with comical suddenness.

“Mercy on us, child, I must have been misinformed!”

“Misinformed, dear aunt!”

“They told me your husband was dead!”

Ellinor came forward, kissed the lady on either wholesome cheek, divested her of her wet shawl and exclaimed at its condition.

“Tush, child, that is nought. ‘The sun shineth on the evil and the rain raineth on the just.’ Matthew, my dear.”—Madam Tutterville was on sufficiently good terms with her authorities to justify a pleasant familiarity. “They told me,” she repeated, “your husband was dead. I shall chide cook Rachael for unfounded gossip. What saith Solomon: ‘The tongue of the wise woman is far above rubies.’”

Ellinor laughed, then became grave.

“Oliver is dead,” she said.

“Dead!”

The rector’s lady fell into a chair, tossed her hat-strings over her shoulders, and fixed her light, prominent eyes upon her niece.

“Your weeds?” she gasped.

“I do not intend to wear any mourning but this black gown.”

“Ellinor!”

“Please, aunt, not another word upon the subject!”

For yet another outraged, scandalised moment, the spiritual autocrat of Bindon glared. But the very placidity of Ellinor’s determination was more baffling than any other attitude could have been to one who, after all ruled more by opportunity than capacity.

"'All flesh is hay,'" she remarked at length, in plaintive tones. "We shall speak further of this anon. Now tell me what are your intentions for the future?"

Ellinor's eyes and dimples betrayed mischievous amusement.

"Do you not think, aunt," she asked, "that Bindon would be the better for some one who could look after it? The place seems to be going to rack and ruin!"

"Alas, my niece, since to a higher sphere I was called forth from this house, 'the roaring lion who walketh about has entered in with seven lions worse than himself.'"

Ellinor crossed the floor and suddenly surprised her aunt's dignity by falling on her knees beside her and hugging her. And, hiding her sunny head on the capacious shoulder, she made vain efforts to conceal the inextinguishable laughter that shook her.

"Why, aunt, why, dear aunt! Oh! Oh! Oh! What has happened since we parted? You've grown so—so learned, so eloquent!"

Despite the strength of Madam Tutterville's brain, her heart was never proof against attack. The clinging, young arms awoke memories and tender instincts. And while the comments upon her new attainments called a smile upon her countenance (which made it resemble that of a huge, complacent baby) she responded to the embrace with the utmost warmth.

"Eh, Ellinor, poor little girl!"

"Oh, Aunt Sophia, it's good to be home again!"

Once more they hugged; then Ellinor sat back on her heels and Madam Tutterville resumed, as best she could, the mantle of the prophetess.

“You see, my dear, it having pleased the Lord to call me into a place or state of spiritual supererogation, it hath become necessary for me to frame the tongue according to its vocation.”

Ellinor nodded, compressing her dimples.

“My brother Simon and your cousin David—God knows I have done my best for them! But it is casting pearls before—you know the scriptural allusion, my dear—to endeavour to raise them to any sense of duty. The place is indeed going to wrack and ruin. They are no better than Amalakites and Ephesians. Between David’s star-worshipping on the one side, like the Muezzin on his Marinet, and your father’s black arts and other incomprehensible doings in his cave of Adullam, my heart is nearly broken. And yet, my dear child, I have not failed, as Paul enjoins, with the word in reason and out of reason. I fear for you, child in this Topheepot!”

“Do not fear for me,” cried Ellinor; her voice was caught up by little titters. “Perhaps,” she added insinuatingly, “if you advise me things may alter for the better.”

“Advice shall not fail you.”

“I shall coax cousin David to let me manage for him.”

Ellinor was still sitting on her heels. She now looked up innocently at Madam Tutterville. And Madam Tutterville looked down at her with a suddenly appraising eye and was struck by a brilliant inspiration over which, in her determination to keep to herself, she buttoned up her mouth with much mystery.

Ellinor had grown—there could be no doubt of that—into a remarkably handsome woman. There was so much gold in her hair, there were so many twists and little misty tendrils, that one could hardly find it in one’s

heart to regret that it should so closely verge on the red. It grew in three peaks and wantoned upon a luminously white forehead.

“She has the Cheveral eyebrows,” thought the parson’s wife, absently tracing her own with a plump, approving finger.

Of the charm of the little straight nose, of the pointed chin, of the curves of the wide, eager mouth, there could be no two opinions. Nothing but admiration likewise for the lines of throat and shoulder and all the rest of the lithe figure on the eve of perfection. It was the beauty of the rose the day before it ought to be gathered. Madam Tutterville gave a small laugh, fraught with secret meaning.

“Amen, child,” said she irrelevantly at last. “Yes, I will have some corporal refreshment; you may give me a cup of tea. But you will have your hands full, I can tell you, with that Nutmeg—Oh, what a house of squanderings and malversations has Bindon become since my days!”

“I saw something of the state of affairs last night,” said Ellinor, as she lifted the kettle from the hob on to the fire to boil again and emptied the contents of the squat teapot into the basin.

Madam Tutterville watched her with approval.

“Another girl would have given me cold slop,” she commented internally. “That husband of hers must have been a brute!”

“Lord, Lord! I never see brother Simon and cousin David, but what I think of Jacob’s dream of the lean kine devoured by the fat ones.” Madam Tutterville, contentedly sipping her tea, had settled herself for a comfortable gossip. “But, there, so long as David is clothed in purple and fine linen (I speak fictitiously, child, as regards colour, for I do not think, indeed, I ever saw David in purple) the servants may rob him as they please. A strange man—never sees a soul, and yet clothes himself like a prince. That old sinner Giles goes to London twice a year and brings back

trunks full, all in the fashion of ten years ago. He'll never use a napkin twice, Ellinor—he don't care if he never eats but a bit of bread or drinks but water, but it must be from the most polished crystal, the finest porcelain."

Ellinor listened without manifesting either amusement or impatience. When her aunt paused she herself remained silent for a while; then, in a low voice, she asked:

"And what then occurred to change his whole life in this manner?"

Madam Tutterville's eyes became rounder than ever. She shook her head with an air of the deepest gravity and importance.

"Do not ask me, my dear—do not ask me, for I may not reveal it," she said. And the next instant the truth leapt from her guileless lips: "There are only three people here that know the whole secret, and they never would tell me, no matter how I tried. David himself, your father and my Horatio."

The lady's countenance assumed a pensive cast, as she reflected upon this want of conjugal confidence.

"His marriage was to have been soon after ours," observed Ellinor musingly.

"Aye, child, so it was. But the girl David loved and that Lochore man—well, well, I can only surmise. But in the end there was devil's work, fighting and duelling! David was brought home wounded, mad, and like to die; and for days and nights, my dear, Simon and Horatio nursed him between them and would not let any one near him while his ravings lasted—not even me, think of that! Of course, my love," she added comfortably, "it is not that my Horatio has not the highest opinion of my discretion; but he had to humour David, and he would die rather than break his word even to a——" She paused, and significantly tapped

her forehead. “Well, well, the poor lad got better at last, and then——Oh, if it were not true no one could have believed it! Maud, his sister (I never could endure her, with her bold black eyes and her proud ways), nothing would serve her but she must marry the very man who all but murdered her own brother! She became Lady Lochore—that was all she cared for! Pride was always eating into her! ‘Proud and haughty scorner is her name, and her proud heart stirreth up strife.’—Proverbs, dear.”

“And David?”

“David, when he heard the news, fell into the fever again; worse than ever. Many was the night Horatio never came home at all, expecting each morning to be the last! It was a terrible time, but, thank the Lord, he got well, if well it can be called. And then this kind of thing began. He withdrew himself completely, no one was ever admitted. Bindon became a waste and a desert. He cannot forgive, child, and he cannot forget—and that is the long and the short of it! Horatio has secured an honest bailiff for the estate, ’twas all he could avail—but, inside, that rogue Margery Nutmeg reigns supreme! And, upon my soul, if something’s not done, brother Simon and cousin David will be both fit for bedlam before the end of the chapter!”

Here the flow of Madam Tutterville’s eloquence was suddenly checked. She sniffed, she snorted; there was a rattle of buckram skirts as of the clank of armour resumed. With finger sternly extended she pointed in the direction of the window—all the gossip in her again sunk in the apostle.

Ellinor’s eyes followed the direction of the finger.

The casement gave upon a green-hedged path that led from one of the moat-bridges to the courtyards behind the keep. By this path the villagers were admitted to Bindon House.

The head of a lame man bobbed fantastically across Ellinor’s line of vision. This apparition was succeeded immediately by that of a fiery

shock of hair over which met, in upstanding donkey's ears, the ends of a red handkerchief folded round an almost equally red expanse of swollen cheek. The silhouette of a girl holding her apron to one eye next flitted past.

"In the name of Heaven," exclaimed Ellinor, "is the whole of Bindon sick this morning? And what brings them to the house?"

"The evil one is still busy among them," quoth the parson's wife oracularly, "and I grieve to say it is your father who is his minister!"

There was something so irresistibly comic in the angry disorder noticeable on the face, heretofore so kindly placid, of Madam Tutterville, that her niece was again overcome by laughter.

"Do not laugh!" said the lady severely; "'The mirth of fools is as the cackle of thorns'—Ecclesiastes—We may all have to laugh one day at the wrong side of our mouths. I live in fear of a great calamity. There have been mistakes already!" she added, lowering her voice to a mysterious whisper, "as Horatio and I know."

Ellinor had grown grave again.

"Even doctors are not infallible," said she reproachfully. "Is poor father the minister of evil because he may have made a mistake?"

"Ah, child, that's just it! Brother Simon is not a doctor, he is—I don't know what he is. He tries his herbs and plants upon the village folk. They flock to him and swallow his drugs because he bribes them, my love, by playing on their heathen superstitions about spells and fairies and bogles and what not. They believe themselves cured because they believe him to be in league with the powers of darkness—a warlock, Ellinor! Bred in the bone, alas! Horatio may joke about it, but so long as I have life I will combat that back-sliding influence. God knows, it is ill and hard work. I

am as the voice of one crying in the wilderness to the locusts and wild honey, but I'll not lift my finger from the plough now!"

She rose. "Come child," she commanded; and followed by Ellinor, led the way downstairs and through long passages to a small dairy room, the window of which gave upon the outer entrance to Master Simon's laboratory.

Here, with tragic gesture, she halted, and bade her niece look forth.

# BOOK I — CHAPTER IX HEALING HERBS, WARNING TEXTS

CHAPTER IX HEALING HERBS, WARNING TEXTS

Here finds he on the oak rheum-purging Polypode; And in some open place that to the sun doth lie He Fumitory gets, and Eyebright for the eye; The Yarrow wherewithal he stays the wound-made gore, The healing Tutsan then, and Plantaine for a sore. —DRAYTON (*Polyolbion*).

The lagging sun of autumn had travelled but a small part of its ascent, and the green inner courtyard of what was known as “the keep wing” of Bindon, so stilly enclosed by its three tall walls and the towering screen of the keep itself, was yet in shadow—not the cheerless, universal grey of a clouded sky, but the friendly, coloured shadiness that is the sunshine’s own doing.

Against the grey stone walls the spreading branches of the blush-rose trees that had yielded of yore so much sweetness to Ellinor’s childish grasp, clung, yellowing and now but thinly clad, yet not all dismantled, with here and there a wan flower or a brave rosebud to bear witness, like the gems of poor gentility, to past riches.

The scene, the special savour of wet grass, the fragrant breath of the dairy were of old familiar to Ellinor; but not so the bench placed upon the flags alongside the wall, with its row of dismal figures; not so the businesslike-looking table, whereat, behind a score of gallipots and phials, a basin of water and a basket full of leaves, stood Master Simon in his flowing gown. He was gravely investigating through his spectacles the finger which a boy whimperingly upheld for his inspection. The

while, Barnaby, uncouthly busy, flitted to and fro between his master's chair and the steps that led down to the laboratory.

Ellinor leant out of the window to gaze in surprise. Here, then, was the work which her father could only pursue in solitude! She now understood the nature of this branch of his studies: the student was testing upon the *corpus vile* of the willing population the virtues of his simples! "Fortunately," thought Ellinor, "such remedies can proverbially do but little harm and often do much good." And she watched his doings with amused interest.

But Madam Tutterville could not look upon them in the same tolerant spirit. When she had numbered the congregation, she stood a moment with empurpled cheeks and rounded lips, inhaling a mighty breath of reprobation, preparatory to launching forth the "word in reason and out of reason" as soon as she saw her chance.

"Now, Thomas Lane," said the unconscious Master Simon impressively, as he wrapped round the finger a rag smeared with green ointment, "if you do as I bid you the fairies won't pinch your poor thumb any more; let me see it next Tuesday. Who is next?"

The buxom damsel, whom Ellinor had noted and who still held the corner of her apron to her eye, advanced and curtseyed.

"Deborah!" cried Madam Tutterville, recognising with horror one of her model village maids.

Master Simon shot a swift glance upwards from under his bushy brows; too well did he recognise the tones of his sister's voice. Ellinor had not deemed him capable of looking so angry; and, unwilling to be associated with any hostile interference, she moved away quietly from her aunt's side, left the room and proceeded to the courtyard itself. She was drawn thither also by another reason. There is the woman who shrinks from the

sight of sores and wounds; and there is the woman whose sensitiveness takes the form of longing to lave and bind. She was of the latter.

When she reached the table the action had briskly begun between Madam Tutterville and her brother. The artillery on the lady's side was characterised rather by rapidity of delivery than by accuracy of aim. The old man's replies were few and short, but every shot told.

Deborah, distracted between awe of the wizard's cunning and deference to a reproving yet liberal mistress, stood whimpering between the two fires of words, her apron making excursions from the sick to the sound eye. Some of the patients grinned, others looked alarmed.

"Are ye not afraid of the Judgment?" Madam Tutterville was saying, ever more fancifully biblical as her wrath rose higher. "So it's your eye that's sore, Deborah! I'm not surprised. Remember how Elijah the sorcerer was struck blind by Peter!"

Deborah wailed:

"Please, ma'am, it wasn't Peter, it was the cat's tail!"

"The cat's tail, Deborah! There is no truth in thy bones!"

"Tut, tut!" here interposed Master Simon. "Who bid you go to the cat's tail?—Sophia, life is short. You are wasting an hour of valuable existence. Go away!"

"'Tis the punishment of the deceitful man," intoned Madam Tutterville from her window as from a pulpit, and emphatically pounded the sill. "'By their figs ye shall know them!' This cat's tail work is the fruit of the tree of your black art, Simon Rickart, of your unholy necrology!"

The simpler's voice cut in like a knife:

"Who bid you rub your sore eye with a cat's tail?"

“Please, sir, please, ma’am, Peter hadn’t anything to say to it, indeed he hadn’t. But, please, ma’am, it was parson’s brindled cat, and Mrs. Rachael—that’s the cook at Madam’s, sir—she do tell me nothing be better for a sore eye than the wiping of it with a brindled cat’s tail. And please, ma’am, I held him while she did rub my sore eye.”

“Mrs. Rachael!”

This was none less than Sophia’s own estimable cook, who read her Bible as earnestly as Madam herself, and was the stoutest church woman (and the best cook) in the country; the model, in fact, of Madam Tutterville’s making.

Master Simon was deftly laving the inflamed eye. And into the silence allowed for this startling minute by his sister’s discomfiture he dropped a few sarcastic words:

“You are fond of texts, Sophia.—Here is one for you: ‘First cast the beam out of thine own eye.’ You have an admirable way of applying them, pray apply this: ‘Cast the sorcery out of thine own kitchen.’ Cats’ tails, indeed! Now, remember, child! (has anyone got a soft handkerchief) I am the only proper authorised magician in this county. If you want magic, come to me and leave Mrs. Rachael and her brindled receipts severely alone. You understand what I mean; I am Bindon’s sorcerer as much as parson is Bindon’s parson.”

Here he seized the silk handkerchief which Ellinor silently offered and began to fold it neatly on the table. Next, from his basket he selected certain bright-green leaves of smooth and cool texture. One of these he clapped over the flaming orb, and tied the silk handkerchief neatly across it.

“And with that upon your eye, my dear, you may defy,” he remarked, maliciously, “even the witch and her cat.—Let me see it next Friday.”

The poor lady at the window was by no means willing to admit defeat; but, nonplussed for the moment, she babbled more incoherently than usual in the endeavour to return the attack.

“The Devil can quote scripts from texture!”

“But give him his due, Sophia, give him his due: he can quote at least with accuracy! Ha, ha!—Now, Amos Mossmason, come forward! I thought you’d come to me at last! I have ready for thee a brew of the most superlative quality! You’re pretty bad, I see, but we shall have you dancing at the harvest-home. Here are seven little packets, one for every day in the week in a cup of water. The little plant, Amos, from which I have extracted this precious stuff, was known to Hippocrates as Chara Saxifraga (think of that!), and those wise and learned men, the Monks of Sermano—”

At this Madam Tutterville again lifted up her voice, and with such piercing insistence that it became impossible to ignore her.

“Now, indeed, has Satan revealed himself! Amos Mossmason, beware! Have nought to do with these Popish spells—it is thus the Scarlet Woman disseminates poison!”

At the word poison the patient hurriedly dropped the packets back on the table, and stared in dismay from the lady of the church to the gentleman of science.

Ellinor, keeping well in the shadow of the window-ledge, out of the range of her aunt’s vision, was startled in the midst of her amusement by an unexpected thunder in her father’s voice:

“Sophia,” he commanded, “go back to your home, open your Bible and seek among the Proverbs for the following text, to wit: ‘The legs of the lame are not equal, so is a parable in the mouth of fools.’ ... Thereupon

meditate! You are a good creature, but weak in the brain, and you do not know your place among the people. Go!”

Madam Tutterville gave a small cry like that of a clucking hen suddenly seized by the throat. She staggered from the window and retired. To confound her by a text was indeed to seethe the kid in its mother’s milk.

“Amos,” said Master Simon, “don’t you be a fool too; take your powders and begone likewise, and let me hear of you next week. Now who will hold the bandage while I dress Ebenezer Tozer’s sore ear?”

“I will,” said Ellinor.

“So you are there?” said the father, without astonishment. “Why, you seem always to be at hand when wanted!”

And Ellinor smiled, well content.

Madam Tutterville sat on a stool in the dairy, fanning herself with her kerchief. She was in a sort of mental swoon, unable as yet to realise the fact that she and the church had been worsted before their own flock.

Presently, with deliberate step, emphasised by a rhythmic jingle of keys, the housekeeper of Bindon appeared in the doorway and looked in upon her in affected astonishment.

Mrs. Margery Nutmeg had a meek and suave countenance under a spotless high-cap unimpeachably goffered and tied under her chin. Her cheeks looked surprisingly fresh and smooth for her sixty-five years; her hair, banded across her placid forehead, was surprisingly black. Her eye moved slowly. She was neither tall nor short, neither fat nor thin. Her hands were folded at her waist. Anything more decent, more respectful, more completely attuned to her proper position, it would be impossible to imagine. Yet before this redoubtable woman, Bindon House and village shook; and in spite of valiant denunciations at a distance Madam

Tutterville herself was rather disposed to conciliate than to rebuke her when they met.

There was indeed no one at the present moment whom she so little desired as witness to her discomposure. Quite deserted by her usual volubility, she had no word by which to retrieve the situation. It was almost an imploring eye that she rolled over the fluttering kerchief. She knew Margery Nutmeg.

“Ain’t you well, ma’am?” asked that dame, with dulcet tones of sympathy.

Madam Tutterville tried to smile, gave it up, panted and shook her head.

“Don’t you, ma’am,” implored Margery, after a moment’s unrelenting gaze, “don’t you, now, so agitate yourself. It’s not good for you, Miss Sophia, I beg pardon, I mean ma’am. It’s not indeed! And you so stout and short-necked! Eh, we’re all sorry for you: the way you’ve been treated, and before the villagers too! But, there, Master Rickart is a very learned gentleman! You ought to be more careful of yourself, ma’am, knowing what a loss you’d be to us all! It do go to my heart to hear your breath going that hard! Let me get you a glass of buttermilk—’tis a grand thing for thinning the blood.”

Madam Tutterville pushed away the officious hand and moved past the steady figure with an indignant ejaculation:

“Margery, you’re an impudent woman!”

She had not even the relief of a text upon her tongue. Her florid cheek had grown pale as she tottered out again through the now empty courtyard. Yes, it was a painfully broad shadow that went by her side. She longed for the comfort of her Horatio’s philosophic presence; for the respectful atmosphere of her own well-ordered household. But she dared not hurry: for there was no doubt of it, her breathing was short.

# BOOK I — CHAPTER X COMPACT AND ACCEPTANCE

CHAPTER X COMPACT AND ACCEPTANCE

——Upon nearer view, A spirit, yet a woman too! And steps of virgin liberty— Her household motions light and free A countenance in which did meet Sweet records, and promises as sweet. —WORDSWORTH (*Lyrical Poems*).

“Dear, dear,” said Master Simon, “what can have become of my ‘Woodville’?”

Ellinor looked up from the little packet of powdered herbs that for the last hour, in the stillness of the laboratory, she had been weighing and dividing.—Great had been her delight to find her help accepted without fresh demur, for she was bent on making herself indispensable.

“My ‘Woodville,’ child!” repeated Master Simon. “Ah, true, true, it has been taken back to the library. David is a good lad, but I could wish him less absolutely particular about his books. Books are made for use, not to show a pretty binding on a shelf! But stars and books—’tis all he cares for!”

Ellinor rose and slipped from the room. Well, she remembered the old “Woodville,” in its grey-tooled vellum with the thick bands and clasps. She knew its very resting-place, between “Master Parkinson,” in black gilt calf, and “Gerard’s Herbal,” in oaken boards.

Once outside she stretched her limbs after the cramping work and began humming the refrain of a little song that came back to her, she knew not how or why, as she plunged into the loneliness of the rambling corridors:

’Twas you, sir, ’twas you, sir! I tell you nothing new, sir— ’Twas you kissed the pretty girl!

At a bend of the passage she stopped: she thought she heard a stealthy footfall behind, and her heart beat faster for the moment with a sense of long-forgotten child-terrors. Then the woman reasserted herself. Yet, as she took up the burden of her catch again and walked on steadily, Mrs. Marvel tossed her head in just the same defiant manner as had been the wont of the child Ellinor, who would have died rather than own to fear.

Dim was the library, but with a warm and golden dimness that was as far removed from gloom as the warm twilight of a golden day.

The scent of the burning wood upon the hearth mingled with the spice of the old leather—Persian, Russian, Morocco, Calf—with the pungency of the old parchment and of the old print upon ancient paper. The air was filled as with the breath of ages.

There is not one of our senses which so masterfully controls the well-springs of memory as that rather contemned and (in this our western hemisphere) uncultivated sense of smell. With a rush as of leaping waters, the founts of the past now fully opened upon Ellinor—bitter and sweet together, as the waters of memory always are. Here had she taken refuge many a time, in the days when nothing stirred in the library but the fire licking the logs, and (as she loved to fancy) the kind, honest spirits of the dead.

Every imaginative child has its bugbear, self-created, or imposed on its helplessness by the coward cruelty of some older person. Her childish dreams had been haunted by that perfectly respectable-looking and urbane bogey, Margery Nutmeg. Under the housekeeper’s sleek exterior she had instinctively felt an extraordinary power of malice, and had always recoiled from her most coaxing approach with a repulsion that nothing could conquer. Just now, as she came along the passage, she had

vaguely thought, just as in the old days, that Margery might be secretly following her.

She laughed at herself as she closed the door; but the sound of the catching lock struck comfort in her heart, and so did the enclosed feeling of sanctuary, of protection.

“Oh, dear old room!” she said aloud. “Dear old books, dear friendly hearth! God grant this may indeed be home at last!”

She looked round, from the oriel window, purple-hung with its deep recess; from its shelves, seat, and screen, set apart like the side chapel of a cathedral for private devotion, to the high-carved ceiling where, in faded colours, the coat-of-arms of past Cheverals displayed honours that could never fade. She kissed her hand to the full length Reynolds of that Sir Everard Cheveral, whose daughter had been her own mother, empanelled above the stone mantelpiece. It was sweet to feel one of such a house.

Again she spoke, half to herself, half to the mellow, genial presentment of her ancestor:

“You would have said that no daughter of Bindon should seek refuge elsewhere but in the house of her fathers.”

“Please, ma’am,” said a low voice at her elbow.

Ellinor started. A woman whom life had taught to keep her nerves under control, it is doubtful whether anything but the old terrors of her childhood would have had the power to send the blood thus back to her heart. Mrs. Nutmeg was at her elbow—Mrs. Nutmeg hardly changed, with the same obsequious smile and deadly eye, dropping another curtsey of greeting as their glances met, and speaking in the familiar, purring manner:

“Mrs. Marvel, ma’am, begging you’ll forgive the liberty in offering you my respectful welcome! I made so bold as to follow you and trust you will excuse the intrusion.”

“How do you do?” said Ellinor.

This, of all possible greetings, was the one she least desired. She hated herself for her weakness; but as she held out her hand, she shrank inwardly from the remembered touch.

“How do you do, ma’am?” responded the other, with perfunctory humility. “I trust I see you well.”

“Thank you,” said Mrs. Marvel over her shoulder, more shortly than her wont, and turned to the shelf to look for her father’s book.

But the obnoxious presence was not so easily dismissed. It followed her to the shelves; it stood behind her; it breathed in her ear. After a minute of irritated endurance, during which her mind absolutely refused to work, Ellinor whisked round impatiently.

“Well?”

“Asking your pardon, ma’am. But, as you are aware, I was unable to attend to you last night, having only returned this morning from Devizes. I must beg your forgiveness for anything you might have to complain of, not having been made aware that you were coming.”

“Oh, everything was quite comfortable,” began Ellinor. Then suddenly remembering her raid over-night, she hesitated and fell silent.

“Yes, ma’am,” pursued the housekeeper, who, among other uncanny characteristics, possessed that of answering thoughts rather than words. “Yes, I was sorry indeed to hear that you had to get things for yourself. I am sure if Sir David knew, it would go near to make Mr. Giles lose his

place, that a guest should be treated so—him that has the cellar key on trust, so to speak."

"I shall explain to your master," said Ellinor, after a perceptible pause.

"Thank you, ma'am. Mr. Giles and me would be obliged. No doubt my master will give me instructions. But I should be grateful—having to provide, and gentlemen liking different fare. (I ought to know their tastes by this time, ma'am.) But ladies being otherwise, and not proposing to lay before you what satisfies us humble servants—I should be grateful to you, ma'am, to let me know how many days your visit at the House is likely to be."

Again there was silence. Ellinor stood looking down, struggling against the feeling of helplessness that seemed to be closing in upon her. Once more the undignified side of her position reasserted itself. But she fought against the thought. Why, between high-minded people of the same blood should this sordid question of give and take come to awaken false pride? Nay, could she not actually serve David by her presence? The hand and eye of a mistress were sorely needed here. Truly, she had heard enough from Madam Tutterville, seen enough herself on the previous night, to realise that Bindon House had become but as a vast cheese in the heart of which the rats preyed unrebuked.

"I cannot tell you yet," said she steadily, though the ripe colour still mounted in her cheeks.

Margery blinked softly like a cat, and, like a cat with claws folded in, she stood. Her voice had a comfortably shocked note as she replied:

"Thank you, ma'am."

"That will do," cried Ellinor.

"Yes, ma'am, thank you. No doubt. But until my master gives me my instructions——"

She stopped; in the listening silence of the room a slight noise had caught her ear. She looked slowly round and Ellinor followed the direction of her eye. From the window recess Sir David himself had emerged, pen in hand, and now came towards them.

Mrs. Nutmeg passed the corner of her apron over her lips and dropped her curtsey. Ellinor stood, her head thrown back like a young deer, watching her cousin's advance with a look of confidence, though beneath her folded kerchief her heart beat quick.

He took her hand, bent, and kissed it. Then retaining it in his, turned upon the housekeeper. Ellinor, with the clasp of his fingers going straight to her heart, was unable to shift her gaze from his face.

"You wish for instructions, Margery," said he, "take them now. You shall obey this lady as you would myself. While she remains here you shall treat her as my honoured guest. Long may it be! And further, if she so pleases, Mr. Rickart's daughter shall be looked upon as mistress at Bindon. And what she does or orders to be done shall be well done for me."

Margery dipped humble acquiescence to each command.

Ellinor had not thought those dreamy eyes of David's could give so cold and yet angry a flash. His brows were hardly knitted, and his voice, though raised to extra clearness, was singularly under control; yet she had a sudden revelation, not only of present anger in the man, but of an extraordinary capacity for strong emotion. And she thought that if ever an evil fate should bring her beneath his wrath, it would be more than she could bear.

"Go, now," said Sir David, still addressing his servant, "but remember, and let the household remember, that though I prefer to watch the stars rather than your doings, I am not really blind to what goes on."

“I am truly glad, sir, to be authorised to give the servants any message from you,” said Mrs. Nutmeg.

She reached the door, paused and threw one of her expressionless glances for no longer than a second or two towards Ellinor; raising her eyes, however, no higher than the knees. Then the door closed softly upon the retreating figure.

David’s slightly slackened grasp was tightened for a moment round his cousin’s fingers, then it relinquished them.

“Forgive me, Ellinor,” said he, “a bad master makes a bad host.”

“David,” said she, looking him bravely in the eyes, “I have hardly a guinea in the world.”

“Oh,” he cried quickly, “you humiliate me——”

She interrupted him in her turn, and as quickly:

“Oh, no, indeed do not think that because of what she said I should seek such protestation from you. But David, though I came here because it was the only refuge open to me, I could not stay unless I had a task to do. I saw last night—before I had been in dear old Bindon an hour—that sadly you want one honest servant here. Let me be that servant to your house; let me be at least now what Aunt Sophia was. I can do the work.”

She had flushed and paled as she spoke, but gained confidence towards the end; and she looked what she felt herself to be, a strong, capable woman.

His eye dwelt upon her, not as last night in exaltation that amounted to hallucination, but as one whose deep and restless sadness finds an unsought peace.

“Will you, indeed?” he said at last. “Will you indeed take under your gracious care my poor, neglected house?”

Their eyes met again. It was a silent compact. After a little pause:

“Do you not think I am very brave to be ready to face Margery?” she asked, with a mischievous dimple.

At this his rare smile flashed out—that smile before which she felt, as she had already over-night, that, in her heart, she abdicated.

“Oh, I know Margery well,” he said, “but her husband was my father’s faithful man, and to keep her was a promise to his dying ears. She knows it and trades on it. I am not—do not believe it,” he added, “quite the lunatic cousin Simon would make me out. At least, I have my lucid moments. This is one. I have profited by it.”

“So have I,” said Ellinor with a lovely smile of gratitude that robbed the words of any flippancy.

They turned together, tall woman behind tall man, the crest of her copper curls on a level with his eyes. Thus they traversed together the great length of the room. Once she paused, mechanically to draw a bunch of dead roses from a dried-up vase—roses placed there, God knows how many summers ago! He marked the action by a glance. Almost unconsciously she lifted the powdering flowers to her lips, inhaling their faint, ghostly fragrance.

As they passed the window recess where, unknown to the new-comers, he had been sitting at his work, he stopped in his turn to lay a paper-weight on the loose sheets that were scattered on the table. A great map, from Hevelius’s Atlas of the Stars, lay outspread, and displayed its phantom-like constellation figures. Ellinor bent down to look.

“See,” said he gravely, placing his finger on the regal crown that the genial old astronomer had lovingly designed for *Corona Borealis*—“see, it is there that the new star has come into being; a fresh gem to the Crown

of the North, fairer even, with its sapphire glance, than Margarita the pearl——”

She looked up, inquiringly:

“Your star?”

“My star,” he answered.

Her words pleased him, and he marked the earnest brilliancy of her blue eyes. His answering look, though unconsciously, was tender as a caress; and she felt it most sweetly. The crumbling rose-leaves scattered themselves in powder upon his papers. She brushed them impatiently away with a superstitious feeling that the past was already too much with her, too much with him. And as she leaned over the table, the live, real, blushing rose that she had gathered in the courtyard that morning loosened itself from her bosom and fell softly on the outmost sheet of the manuscript notes. Here David’s hand had sketched boldly the wreath-like constellation that had borne him an unexpected blossom.

Ellinor saw her flower lie upon it with pleasure.

“Could Hevelius have seen his crown so enriched—but it is given to few to chronicle a name in the Heavens! A star may appear and then wane, but not this one, not this one!” He spoke half to himself.

“When was the last great star born?” she asked.

“Before this old Hevelius’ day,” said David. He drew another map from under the tossed book and flung it open for her, never heeding that it rested on the petals of her rose. “But see here, 1660—on a day of rejoicing for England—the King had returned to his own—what seemed to many to be a new star appeared, brightly burning. Flamsteed named it, out of the joy of the people, *Cor Caroli*—the Heart of Charles.”

“The heart of Charles,” she repeated. “It is pretty. What will you call yours?”

“I dare not name it yet,” he said.

“Dare not?” she echoed astonished.

“Lest it should belie me—fade and leave me the poorer,” he answered.

There came a silence. The clock punctuated the fitful rushing sound of the wind round the house, ticked off a minute of life for Ellinor as full of thought and as pregnant of possibility, as sweet and as rich in promise as any she had ever passed in her already eventful life.

She had the impression of some extraordinary happiness that might be hers; that yet was so elusive, so high, so shy a thing, that it would melt away in the grasp of human hands. She had, too, a little unreasonable foreboding, because her rose lay crushed under his astronomy. With a sigh at last, chiding herself for folly and dreams unworthy of her new life—she who had offered herself, and been accepted as his servant, no more—she moved away from the table.

The action roused him. He went with her. On the way to the door he made another halt, and indicated by a slight gesture the urbane countenance of that common ancestor whom Ellinor had addressed and who now, lighted up by a capricious ray, seemed to look down upon them with a living eye of favour. She stood confused as she remembered how boldly, as if by right of kinship, she had claimed aloud in that silent room the hospitality of Bindon.

“I only represent him here,” said he, divining her thought.

“Ah, cousin David,” said she, “say what you will, my father and I will always be deeply in your debt.”

He turned and looked at her gravely.

“Surely,” he answered, after a pause, “a man’s inheritance is not solely his own. It is but a trust. It is to be used and passed on. Those that come after me,” added he musingly, “will not be the poorer, but the richer for my unwonted mode of life. Yet, meanwhile, Ellinor, you can help me to put to better purpose the wealth yearly expended in this house. For there are abuses in a household which only a woman’s hand can reach.”

“They shall be reached then,” said she.

# BOOK I — CHAPTER XI LAYING THE GHOSTS

CHAPTER XI LAYING THE GHOSTS

Her eyes Had such a star of morning in their blue That all neglected places ... Broke into music. —TENNYSON (*Aylmer's Field*).

Out of the warm library into the deserted, echoing round-vaulted hall, on the walls of which broad sheets of tapestry hung, dimly splendid, between fluted pilasters of marble. It seemed to Ellinor, when the swing door had fallen behind her with its soft thud, as if they had left the nave of some church; left a home-like refuge filled with living presences, benign spirits and warm incense; to enter the coldness of a crypt that spoke but of the tomb.

She shivered, and the gay smile faded on her lips. Their footsteps fell forlorn upon the stone floor. David now seemed to drift apart from her, to move unsubstantial in these forsaken haunts of grandeur. But it was her nature to re-act against such impressions. Her alert eye noted the moth in the tapestry, the rust on the armour, the dust lying thick on the white marble heads and limbs of statues that kept spectre company in the semi-darkness.

"Oh," she cried suddenly, "what red fires we shall have on these cold hearths! How the village maids shall rub and scrub! How God's good sunshine shall come pouring in through those dull windows! How rosy this Venus shall shine under the glow of the stained glass!"

He turned to her, as if called by the sound of the young voice back from the habitual grey dream that his own silent home had come to be for him.

“See, cousin David, poor Diana too! She has not felt on her breast a breath of sweet woodland air, I verily believe, since—since I left the place myself these ten years. She shall spring,” added Ellinor, after a moment’s abstraction, “from a grove of palms. And when the wind blows free, the shadow of the leaves shall fall to and fro upon her and cheat her forest heart. At least”—catching herself up as she noted his eye fixed upon her with a strange look—“at least, Sir David, if you will so permit.”

He still looked at her musingly. In reality he was going over the mere sound of her words in his mind, as a man might recall the sweetness of a strain of music.

“You shall have a free hand,” he said. “And, once more, what you do shall be well done.”

An odd sense of emotion took hold of her, she knew not why. More to conceal it than from any set intent, she moved forward and turned the handle of the door that, on the other side of the hall, led to the suite of drawing-rooms. He followed close and they looked in together. The vast abandoned apartment was full of a musty darkness.

“Heavens!” she cried, “do they never open a window?”

Narrow slits of light darting in from the divisions in the shutters cut through the heavy air and revealed, when their eyes had grown accustomed to this deeper gloom, the shapeless, huddled rows of linen-covered furniture.

“Ghosts—ghosts!” said David under his breath.

With quick hands she unbarred a shutter and, her impetuous strength making little of rusty resistance, flung open the casement before he had had time to divine her intention. He halted on his way to help her, arrested by the gush of blinding light and the blast of wild wind, that seemed to leap at his throat.

“Oh,” she exclaimed, standing in the full ray and breathing in—so it seemed to him—both the elements. “Oh, the warm light, the sweet air!”

A line of Shakespeare awoke in some corner of his memory: “A thing of fire and air.” ... How vividly it seemed to fit her then!

Without, the changeful day had turned to wind and sun. She stood in the very shaft of the light, in the flood of the breeze; he stood watching her from within, in the gloom and the stagnation. Her black gown fluttered and turned flame at the edges; alternately clung to, and waved away from her straight limbs, now revealing, now throwing into shadow the curves of a foot that, in its sandal, pressed the ground as lithely as ever a Diana’s arrested on the spring. The fresh airs engulfed themselves under her kerchief into her white bosom. It was as if he could watch them playing around her throat, even as if he could see them fluttering and flattering her hair.... Her hair! The sun’s sparkles had got into it! Now it rose, nimbus-like; now it danced, a spray of fire, back from her forehead; now again, under the flying touches, it fell back and rippled like a cornfield in the breeze.

This radiant creature! The more Sir David looked, the further apart he felt his fate from hers. She seemed to belong all to the dancing wind and the glad sun-light. From such an one as he, from his melancholy, his gloom, his fading life, she seemed as much cut off as ever the unattainable stars from his wondering night watch.

Thus they stood for the space of a minute. Then Ellinor turned. Light and freshness now filled the great room. The keen breath of the woods gaily drove into corners and chased away the mouldy vapours, the vague, shut-up breath of the old brocades, of the crumbling potpourris, of the sandal-wood and Indian rose; even as the light of Heaven drove the shadows back under the cabinets and behind the pillars, and awoke to life the gold moulding and the fleur-de-lis on the white walls, the delicate wreaths and tracery on the trellised ceilings.

“See, cousin David, the ghosts are gone!”

But the man had withdrawn to the shadow. There was now no answering light in his eye. He had now no phrase, tardy in coming, yet quick in the sympathy of her thought, such as had before delighted her. What had come to him? She gave a little laugh; the vigour, the freedom from without had got so keenly into her veins that she was as though intoxicated.

“I vow,” she cried, “you are like a ghost yourself! Why, you look like a dim knight from the tapestry yonder in the hall, wandering ...”

She broke off. The words were barely out of her mouth before she had read upon his countenance that they had struck some chord which it should have been all her care to leave silent. It was not so much that his pale face had grown paler or his deep eye more brooding, it was more as if something that had been for a while restored to life had once more settled into death; as if an open door had been closed upon her.

“A ghost, indeed,” he said at last, after a silence, during which she thought the sunshine faded and the wind ceased to sing. “A ghost among ghosts!”

“David!” she cried and quickly came close to him in the shadow. The light passed from her face as the sun sparkled away from her hair: a pale woman in a black dress, she was now nothing more!

Imagination, that plant which wreathes with flowers the open life of man, grows to mere clinging, unwholesome luxuriance of stem and leaf in dark, secluded existences. Sir David’s fanciful mind, disordered by too long solitude, had become incapable of viewing in just perspective the small events and transient pictures of that every day world to which he had so persistently made himself a stranger.

The sudden difference in Ellinor's appearance, following as it did upon a deeply melancholy impression, struck him as an evil portent.—This, then, was what would happen to her youth and brightness, were fate to link her life with one so unfortunate as he!

She stretched out her hand to touch him. The riddle of his attitude baffled her.

"David!" she repeated, pleadingly. He drew gently back from her touch.

"Cousin," he said, and she heard a vibration as of some dark trouble in his voice, "keep to what sunshine this old house will admit. But in God's name do not seek to explore its shadows."

"But do you not see," she cried, pointing to the open window, "that all shadows give way before my hand?"

He made no answer, unless a long look, inscrutable to her, but yet that seemed to search into her very soul, could be deemed an answer.

"Come," she went on resolutely. "Let us go through this dim house of yours together, and see what can be done. Ghosts!" she repeated, "the ghosts of Bindon are rust and dust and emptiness and silence and neglect. God's light, dear cousin, and the wood airs, the birds' songs, soap and water, stout hearts and true, and good company—give me but these and I'll warrant you I'll lay your ghosts."

Into his earnest gaze came a sort of tender indulgence, as for the prattle of a child.

"Come then," said he, simply.

But she felt that now it was to humour her, and not because she had reached the seat of his melancholy.

However, with heart and spirit as determined as her step, she drew him with her through the long, desolate rooms, leaving everywhere light and

freshness where she had found darkness and oppression. Then through the ball-room, where the silence and the weighted atmosphere, the shrouded splendour and the faded brilliancy made doubly sad a space designed all for mirth and music. This feeling struck her in spite of her resolution; and when, before passing out into the hall again, David paused to look back and said, as if to himself: “Sometimes darkness is best; at least it hides the void,” she had this time no answer for him.

Slowly they ascended the great oaken stairs that creaked beneath their tread as if too long unused to human steps. Slowly they paced the length of the picture gallery, just illumined enough through drawn blinds to show the little clouds of dust set astir by their feet and to draw the pale faces of pictured ancestors from the gloom of their canvas backgrounds. The shadowed eyes, divined rather than seen in the delusive light, seemed to follow Ellinor with wistful questioning: “What will this child of ours do for our sorrowful house?”

Slowly and silently they progressed through the long suites of empty guest-chambers, where four-posters stood like catafalques and unsuspected mirrors threw back at them sudden phantom-like images of their own passing countenances. At length Ellinor paused irresolute; then she arrested David as he once more mechanically advanced to unbar a shutter.

“Nay,” she said, “the rest shall sleep a few days more. I have seen enough of the enchanted castle.” She tried to laugh. “Not, mind you, that I doubt being able to break its spell!” she added. But her laugh rang muffled, even to herself, in an air that seemed too heavy to hold it. She caught David by the sleeve, and dragged him into the comparative cheerfulness of a corridor lit at either end by a blessed gleam of blue sky.

They had reached once more the keep wing of the house. There was stone beneath their feet, stone above their heads, stone walls, ochre-washed on either side.

“Ah,” cried she, a sudden wave of memory breaking over her, called up by the vision through the deep hewn windows. “How well I recollect! I used to play here. This is the old nursery.”

She flung open a narrow door; the long, low-ceiled room within was flooded with whitest light, for its barred windows boasted no shutters. The shadows of the tall trees outside danced like waters on the walls. Cobwebs hung in festoons even in the yawning grate. Two little beds stood covered with a patchwork quilt; a headless rocking-horse was in one corner, a tiny wooden chair in another. An empty nursery! As sad to look on as an empty nest! Ellinor’s eyes brightened with tears; a hot tide of passion, sprung of an inexplicable mixture of feeling, rushed from her heart to her lips. She turned almost fiercely on David, who had remained in the doorway.

“Oh, why have you wasted your life?” she cried. “Why have you turned your back on all the good things God gives man? Why is your home desolate, your hearth vacant, your heart solitary? David, David, this house should never have been empty thus; there should be children round your knee! What have you done with your life?”

The tears brimmed over and ran down her cheeks. Then her strange passion fell away from her, and she stood ashamed. He had started first and put up his hand as if to thrust back her words. There was a long silence. When he broke it, it was as one who speaks upon the second thought, with the cold control that follows an unadmitted emotion.

“For me such things will never be.”

“Why, why?” The cry seemed forced from her.

He waved his hand with the gesture of the most complete renunciation.

“Never,” he repeated.

The word, she felt, was final. She gazed at him almost angrily; then tears, caused now by mortification and confusion, rose irresistibly again. To conceal them she turned to the window, pulled open the queer little casement and, leaning on her elbows, looked out in silence.

Below her lay the Herb-Garden, with its variegated autumn burden of berries, red or purple or sinister orange; its groups of fantastically shaped leaves, turning to tints not usually known in this sober clime; here a patch, violet, nearly black; and there a streak of tropical scarlet; elsewhere again mauve, verdigris-green—colours, indeed, that village folk said, “no Christian plants ought to produce.” The scents of them, as pungent yet different in decay as ever in their blossom time, rose to her nostrils mixed sweet and bitter, over-dulcet, poisonous or aromatic-wholesome.

The sight and the smell were full of subtle reminiscence. She felt her throbbing heart calm down, her hot cheeks grow cool. In some mysterious way, now as in her childhood, the Herb-Garden seemed to draw her and to speak to her; to promise and withhold some fairy secret, she knew not whether for joy or sorrow, but yet incomparably sweet. As she gazed forth she noticed the quaint figure of her father come into view from behind a clump of bushes. He was attended by Barnaby, who, under the direction of his master’s gesture, culled leaves and flowers. Circling round the pair, Belphegor, the black cat, could be seen gravely watching the proceedings. There was something peaceful and world-detached in the silent scene, and it brought back some of that sense of rest and home-return which she had found so blessed the previous night.

All at once she felt close to her the shadowing presence of her cousin, and the next moment his touch upon her shoulder sent her blood leaping.

“For five years,” said David, “your father has been looking for a certain plant. He says, Ellinor, that it is the ‘True-Grace,’ the *Euphrosinum* of the ancients, called by the primitive simplers at home, ‘Star-of-Comfort.’

And its properties, as he believes, are to bring gladness to the sore heart and the drooping spirit. But all traces of it have been lost. If it still blooms, it blooms somewhere unknown. Never an autumn passes but your father plants fresh seeds, seeds that reach him from all parts of the world ... with fresh hope." He stopped significantly.

She turned to him with wide eyes; he looked back at her. Both his glance and voice were full of kindness.

"That would be a precious plant, would it not?" he went on. "'True-Grace' ... 'Star-of-Comfort.' Is there such a thing in this world? To your father its discovery is what the quest of the Powder of Projection, of the Elixir of Life was to the alchemist of old; of Eldorado to the merchant-adventurer, of Truth to the philosopher—does it exist? Will he ever find it?" Then he added: "Who knows ... perhaps you will have brought him luck."

And when he had said this his dark face was lit by his rare smile.

"What is it that could comfort you?" she cried, clasping her hands.

His very gentleness brought her some comprehension of a sadness illimitable as when the mists rise dimly above vast seas and fall again. His face set into gravity once more, his gaze wandered from her face out through the little window to the far-off amethyst hills on the horizon.

"To be able to forget ... perhaps," he answered, as if in a dream.

# BOOK I — CHAPTER XII A KINDLY EPICURE

## CHAPTER XII A KINDLY EPICURE

——The easy man Who sits at his own door; and, like the pear That overhangs his head from the green wall, Feeds in the sunshine ... —WORDSWORTH (*Reflective Poems*).

The fruit in the rectory garden, the pears from the rector's own tree, had all been culled; Madam Tutterville had seen to that. And where she ruled, if there was always abundance of the choicest description, there was no waste.

The rector liked fruit to his breakfast. He belonged to a generation who made breakfast an important meal; an occasion for the feast of wit as well as of palate; for the consorting of choice souls, the first freshness upon them and the dew still sparkling upon the laurel that binds the poet's brow. The breakfast hour is one when the mellow beam of good repose shines still in the eye, mitigating the sarcasm of the man of humour, enhancing the charm of the man of elegant parts, ripening the wits of the learned. That hour (not unduly early, mind you) when the morning has already gained warmth but not lost crispness; when with pleasure and profit a party of cultured gentlemen can meet, bloom as of peach on well-shaven cheek—*rasés à velour*, as the French barber of those days quaintly had it—silk stocking precisely drawn over re-invigorated muscle; and, thus meeting, exchange the good things of the mutual mind with critical sobriety, while discussing in similar manner the good things of bodily refreshment.

They were good days when social convention countenanced such hours of elegant leisure! Good times were they that still cherished the delicately

dallying scholar, the epicure in life and in learning; that admired the man who knew how to sip and relish, and to whom essential quality was of overpoweringly vaster importance than quantity. A good age, when hurry was looked upon almost as an ungentlemanly vice and the anxious mind of business was held incompatible with culture!

Of such was the reverend Horatio Tutterville, D.D., late Fellow of Oriel College, Oxford, Rector of Bindon. And to him the breakfast hour was still sacred: an hour of serene enjoyment to which he daily looked forward as the great prize of life, and which prepared him for a day of duties performed with admirable deliberation.

True, the fates had so marshalled his existence that but few were the congenial friends who could now and again come and share these pleasant moments under the flickering shades of the pear-tree, or in the cosy parsonage dining-room; sit at those tables—both round! —which it was at once Madam Sophia's pride and privilege to supply with an exquisite and varied fare.

But little recked he of that; choice spirits there were still with whom he could consort at any time; spirits as rare as any who in Oxford Common-Room, in Town, or in Cathedral precincts ever had communed with him. Aye, and rarer! Spirits, moreover, ready at all hours of the night or day, and always in gracious mood, to yield their hoarded wisdom or sweetness to the lingering appreciation of his palate.

The choice of his morning's companion always was with Dr. Tutterville one of solicitude and discrimination. A Virgil, or some other subtle singer of like brilliance, on mornings when the sun was very hot and the sky of Italian blue between the high garden walls; when the bees were extra busy over the fragrant thyme beds, and when some fresh cream cheese and honey and whitest flour of wheat were most tempting on the fair cloth. "Rare Ben Jonson," perhaps, on a stormy autumn day, when the wood fire roared up the chimney and a fine old hearty English

breakfast of the game pie or boar-head order could be fitly topped up by a short, but nobly creaming beaker of Audit ale.

Like so many men who have read sedulously in their student days the reverend Horatio, now in his dignified leisure, read little, but with nicest discrimination; and in that little found an inexhaustible fund of unalloyed contentment. He would also quote felicitously from his daily reading as a man might from the conversation of a valued friend.

It is indeed not every one who ever learns the art of book-enjoyment. Your true reader must be no devourer of books. To him the thought committed to the immortality of print, crystallised to its shapeliest form, polished to its best lustre, is one which demands and repays lingering communion. If books are worth reading at all, they should be allowed to speak their full meaning; they should be hearkened to with deference. And it was always in pages that compelled such honourable attention that Dr. Tutterville sought that intellectual companionship which made his country seclusion not only tolerable, but blissfully serene.

Madam Tutterville, whether from convenience to herself, or (we had rather believe), from shrewd conception of the proprieties and wifely respect for the moods of her lord, never shared the forenoon repast. Indeed, she had generally accomplished much business in household or village before the learned divine emerged from that sanctuary where the mysteries of his careful toilet and of his early meditation were conducted in privacy and decorum.

But it was on rare occasions indeed that she could not snatch five minutes out of her multifarious occupations for the pure pleasure of watching her Horatio’s complacency as he sipped her coffee and his book.

Happy man, whose own capacity for enjoyment could so gratify another’s!

On this particular morning—a week after the exciting day of Ellinor Marvel's return—Madam Tutterville, having duly examined the weather-glass, scanned the sky and personally tested the warmth of the air, deemed that for perhaps the last time that year she might safely set her rector's breakfast in the garden.

For it was one of those days which a reluctant summer drops into the lap of autumn; a day of still airs and high vaulted skies, faintly but exquisitely blue; when, red and yellow, the leaves cling trembling to the bough from which there is not a puff of wind to detach them—and if they fall, fall gently as with a little sigh.

On such a day the frost, that over-night has laid light, white fingers everywhere, would be unguessed at but for the delicate tart purity of the air, which the sunshine, however it may warm it, cannot eliminate. A day in which you might be cheated into thoughts of spring, were it not for the pathos of the rustling leaf, the solitary monthly rose, the boughs that let in so much more heaven between them, and the lonely eaves where swallow broods are rioting no longer.

Madam Tutterville, as we have said, knew her parson's tastes to a shade.

The round green table and rustic chair were therefore set between that edge of sunshine and shadow that spelt comfort. In her devoted soul the autumnal poetry was translated into housewife practicality: into broiled partridge still fizzling under the silver cover, a comb of heather-honey, a purple bunch of grapes invitingly stretched on their own changing leaves.

An hour later the good soul came forth again into the garden to enjoy her reward. A covered basket on her arm, that same plump, white member tightly folded with its comrade over the crisp muslin kerchief and the capacious bosom; the Swiss straw-hat, tied with a black ribband under the chin, shading, but not concealing the lace cap of fine Mechlin, the curls, and the rosy smiling countenance.... No unpleasing spectacle for

any reasonable husband's eye! So thought the parson. As her shadow fell across the patch of sunshine in front of him, he looked up and smiled from the pages of his book.

The companion of the morning was the Olympian who has immortalised in beauty almost every theme and mood of the human mind. It had struck the divine, whilst inquiringly surveying his shelves, that the noble figure of Prospero would be evoked with singular fitness on this placid October morn. The volume—propped against the glistening decanter of water—was one Baskerville's edition of Shakespeare and opened at Act IV. of the Tempest.

The rector, brought back from the green sward of the wizard's cell to his actual surroundings, smilingly looked his inquiry as his spouse stood in patience before him.

"Ah, my delicate Ariel!" said he, with the most benevolent sarcasm.

Nor, as Madam Tutterville gazed down upon him, was she behind him in conjugal complacency. Nay, as her eyes wandered over the handsome countenance with the classic firm roundness of outline, which might have graced a Roman medal, her heart swelled within her with a tender pride.

"What a man is my Horatio!" she thought, not without emphasis on the word "my." For well she knew how much her care had contributed to that same rich outline.

Everything about this excellent man was ample. Ample the wave of hair that rose in a crest from an expansive brow and still sported a cloud of scented powder after the fashion of his younger years. Ample the curve of his high nose; ample the chin and nobly proportioned. Ample the chest that gently swelled from under the snowy ruffles to that fine display of broadcloth waistcoat where dangled the golden seals and the watch that methodically marked the flight of the rector's golden moments. But the rector's legs had so far resisted the encroachment of general amplitude.

There the only curve, one in which he took an innocent pride, was a fine line that, under the meshes of well-drawn silk hose, led from knee to heel with clean and elegant finality.

No wonder that Madam Tutterville's breast should heave with the glory of possession.

Her smile broadened, as she glanced from the well-picked partridge bones to the plump fingers that now toyed with the grapes. She noted also the reticent smile that hovered on the divine's lips, as if in sympathetic answer to her own. Yet, though she beamed to see her lord so content, the true inwardness of this same content escaped her—naturally enough. What could Madam Sophia know of that thousandth new elusive beauty he had even now discovered in Prospero's green and yellow island? How could she guess that it had broken upon his mental palate with a flavour cognate to that of the luscious grapes she had provided? What could she know of the spice of genial sarcasm that likened one of her own vast proportions to the ministering sprite of the amiable wizard—and yet saw a delightful modern fitness in the comparison? Far indeed was she from realising the endless amusement her conversation afforded to a mind as accurate on one side as it was humourous on the other.

*Sermo index animi.* If speech be the mirror of the mind, Doctor Tutterville's mind revealed itself as elegant, balanced, and polished. Nothing more orderly, more concise, more jealously chosen than his word and enunciation. Nothing, in short, could have been in more absolute contrast to the hurling ambitious volubility of his consort.

"Well, Doctor Tutterville," said madam, "did the bird like you well!"

"The bird? Excellent well, Sophia. But first, or last, your fine Egyptian cookery shall have the fame!"

"Ah," said the lady, beaming, "Proverbs!—Yes. I must say that for Solomon, he knew how to value a wife."

“No one was ever better qualified, my dear,” said the parson kindly.

It was characteristic of the lady that, however unknown the source of her husband’s illustrations, however unintelligible his allusions, sooner would she have perished than own it even to herself. And as he, in his original enjoyment of her happy shots, was careful never to correct her, the conversation of the admirable couple proceeded with unchecked briskness on one side and ungrudging appreciation on the other.

Doctor Tutterville drew his chair back from the table, crossed his legs and prepared to enjoy himself, nothing being better for the digestion than quiet laughter. Madam deposited her basket, and selecting a snowy churchwarden pipe from the box that reposed upon the bench by the side of the pear-tree, proceeded to fill it with Bristol tobacco out of a brass pot. Very lightly did she stuff the bowl: for the Rector took his tobacco as he took his other pleasures—a few light whiffs, the best of the herb! “Once the freshness and fragrance gone,” he was wont to say, “you might as well drink wine after you had ceased to possess its flavour.”

“Well, my love?” said he, as he took the brittle stem between his fore and second finger.

“Well, Horatio,” said she, comfortably subsiding on the bench. “I have been to Bindon, and, oh, my dear Doctor, what a change has come over the place!”

“I remarked the improvement,” said the parson, “both in sweetness and in light upon my visit three days ago. That daughter of brother Rickart’s seems a capable young woman.”

“Bring up a child,” quoth Madam Sophia, complacently. “I flatter myself she does credit to my early training. You have not forgotten, Doctor, that ’twas I who (as the scripture bids us) directed that young idea how to shoot. I vow,” cried she, “I could not be setting about things better

myself. But, oh, Horatio, how are the mighty humbled!... I refer to Margery Nutmeg."

"Mrs. Nutmeg's manners are always so much too humble for my liking," said the divine, "that I presume you allude thus rhetorically to her circumstances."

"Certainly, my dear Doctor—*ex cathedrum*, as you would say."

"I never should, my dear. But let it pass."

"You know what a thorn in the spirits these goings on of hers have been to me and you will therefore lift up your voice and rejoice, I feel sure, when I tell you that my dear niece has now all the keys in her possession. Margery has found her mistress again."

The divine laid down his pipe and the benign amusement of his expression gave way to a look of gravity.

"No doubt," he said, after a pause, "you good ladies know what you are doing. But personally, I should prefer not to retain Mrs. Nutmeg on the premises if it was my business to thwart her."

But madam, strong in a sense of victory over the dreaded enemy, scouted the suggestion.

"That excellent girl, Ellinor, was actually having the meat weighed and apportioned," she announced triumphantly, "at the very moment of my arrival this morning. So Mistress Margery's retail business hath come to an end. A sheep killed every week, Horatio, and pork in the servants' hall! The woman was an absolute Salomite! How often did I not remind her of Paul's warning! 'Serve ye your masters with flesh in fear and trembling.'"

The gentle merriment that Madam Tutterville was happily wont to take as a token of approval in her lord, here shook his goodly form.

“But my voice was as that of the pelican in the wilderness. Well, all her sweet smiles and curtseys this morning would not take me in. She knows her day is over—though she hides her rage.”

“*Malevolus animus abditos dentes habet*,” murmured the parson.

“Indeed, my dear Doctor,” plunged the lady, “you never said a truer word. But what could she expect?”

“And have you forgiven your brother for so incontinently presuming to quote the scriptures against you the other day?”

“Why, Doctor, you know I never bear malice. And, dear sir, if you had but seen him, I vow you’d scarcely know him. He hath a new dressing-gown and that dear, excellent girl has actually prevailed on him to trim his beard!”

“I hope,” said the parson, “the young lady will leave something of my old friend. From the days of Samson I mistrust woman when she begins to wield her scissors upon man. And have Simon’s other peculiarities departed from him with his patriarchal beard and ancient garments?”

“Indeed, my dear Doctor, he was quite a lamb. I have promised him a volume of your sermons, that which refers to the keeping of the first, second, and third commandments, that he may see for himself how reprehensible are his dealings with magic and such things. ‘Take a lesson’ (I cried to him) ‘of my Horatio’!”

She was proceeding with ever increasing, ever more tripping volubility and unction—“Model your life ever upon the Decameron, and you will never be far wrong!” But here a Homeric burst of merriment interrupted the flow of her eloquence.

The reverend Horatio lay back in his chair, while the quiet garden close rang to the unwonted sound of sonorous laughter. When at length, with

catching breath and streaming eyes, he found strength wherewith to speak:

“Perdition, catch my soul, most excellent wretch, but I do love thee!” quoted he, and was promptly off again with such whole-hearted and jovial appreciation that, feeling she must indeed have pointed her moral with telling appositeness, his lady’s countenance became suffused with crimson and was also irradiated by her peculiarly infantile smile of conscious delight. She pursed her lips to prevent herself from spoiling the situation by another word.

“And what did brother Simon reply?” asked the rector, as soon as he became able to articulate.

“Oh,” said she proudly, “you will be gratified, Horatio: he looked very grave and seemed much impressed; said he could not promise, but that he would think it over; he would watch and see how you got on.”

Loud rang the parson’s laugh again.

“Meanwhile,” shrieked Madam Sophia, triumphantly, “he said he would prefer to study the question in the original Italian—whatever he may have meant by that. I cannot but feel there is promise.”

“Extraordinary, extraordinary!” said Horatio Tutterville. “And David?” he asked presently. “Are you going to enrol him as a follower of Boccacio?”

“My dear Doctor,” smiled the lady, “I flatter myself that I can follow you in the vernal tongue as well as anyone—but when it comes to Hebrew, I plead the privileges of my sex! This much I understand, however: you refer to David. Well, he also is putting off the old man. Doctor,” she clasped her hands and drew her large countenance wreathed in smiles of mystery, close to his ear to whisper: “This will end in marriage bells! Mark my words.”

“Thus the prophetess!” replied the rector, with the scoff of the true man for the match-making feminine. “Alas, my poor Sophia, there’s no marrying stuff in David!”

He wiped his eyes, and rose.

“Well,” he said, “after the bee has sipped he must to work.”

“You will find,” said she, “a fire in your study, your books as you left them last night and a bunch of our last roses where you love to see them.”

Sedately the reverend Horatio moved towards the peaceful precincts, where awaited him the pages of his next Advent sermons—and perhaps also the manuscripts of those delicate commentaries on Tibullus, long promised to his Oxford publisher.

THE STAR DREAMER

# BOOK II

The night Hath been to me a more familiar face Than that of man; and in her starry shade Of dim and solitary loveliness I learned the language of another world. —TENNYSON.

# BOOK II — CHAPTER I MIDSUMMER SUNRISE

CHAPTER I MIDSUMMER SUNRISE

... the blue Bared its eternal bosom, and the dew Of summer nights collected still to make The morning precious: Beauty was awake. —KEATS (*Sleep and Poetry*).

A dawn in June: the dawn of a night that has held no real blackness, but merged from a sky of sapphire to one of grey pearl—sapphire so starlit, that ever deeper deeps and ever bluer transparencies seemed to unveil themselves to the watchers eye; grey pearl pulsing into opal, shot with milky pinks, faint greens, ambers and primroses.

Into the dewy morning world came Ellinor; down through the long stone passages that still held night and silence; out into this awakening, this freshness, this lightsomeness.

The wonders of the summer dawn, day after day, bring to the old Earth, as it were, a new creation. She awakes and finds the forgotten paradise from which man, of his own sluggard choice, shuts himself out with gates of darkness and leaden bolts of sleep.

Ellinor, her fair face emerging from the folds of her dark, grey-hooded cloak, came pearl-like as the young day itself from the folds of the night. Her slender foot left its print on the dew-moist path. She passed between the stately flower-beds through the great formal pleasure-grounds where, under the sunrise radiance, the masses of geranium blooms were taking to themselves silvery colours unknown to the later day; between the ranks of cypress and box, whose grotesque and fantastic shapes were duskily cut out against the transparent sky one moment and the next

seemed fringed with green flame as the level rays leaped at them; up the shrubbery walks, where the white syringa was breaking into odorous stars, scattering its scented dew upon her as she brushed the outstretched branches; under the black and solemn shades of the yew-trees, until she reached the gate that gave access to the Herb-Garden.

She walked slowly, drinking in the loveliness of the hour. The bees were humming loudly over the spicy beds. The whole garden was full of sweet growing hum and stir; of the flash of wet bird wings. Its strange blossoms swaying in the capricious little breeze seemed to hold private councils, then nod familiarly at her, welcoming and beckoning on.

Ellinor stood, her hand still on the gate, her brow towards the radiant east; the hood had slipped from her head and a sun-shaft pierced her hair. She never crossed the threshold of this garden without a curious sense of something impending. And now, as she paused to breathe its ever new fragrances, the happy humour in which she had started on her quest for herbs (to be gathered at the hour of sunrise, according to Master Gerard's own prescription) gave place to the old childish sense of mysterious awe and attraction.

And as she stood, musing, the sound of a rapid step was heard on this garden space, so far consecrate to herself and to the wild things; a darker shadow detached itself from the heavy shade of the yew-tree. She turned round quickly to face it. Sir David was beside her.

"The purity of the morning," he thought, "and the dawn still in her eyes!"

"David!" she cried, astonished; and a happy rose leapt into her cheek.

"I saw you," he said, "from my tower."

She glanced up to the frowning grey stone mass that was beginning to cast sharply its long shadow on the sunlit garden—then she looked back

at his face, pallid and a little drawn. And if he had seen the dawn in her eyes she saw in his shadow of the night watch.

“Ah,” she cried and menaced him with her white finger. “No sleep again, David! And your promise?”

“The stars lured me,” he answered, smiling faintly. Ellinor, however, did not smile. The rose flush faded slowly from her face. The stars lured him! Would it then always be so? She gave a little sigh. Then, without speaking, she drew a key from her reticule and slipped it into the lock; it required the effort of both her strong hands to turn it, but she would do it herself.

“Nay, cousin, it is a fancy of mine. I alone am trusted with the keys of the sanctuary. It is I that shall open to you the gate of our Herb-Garden.”

It fell back, groaning on its hinges; and she stood inside, smiling again.

“Come in, David.”

“Do you know,” he said, still standing on the threshold, humouring her mood according to his wont, “that I have actually never trodden this rood of ground before.”

She clapped her hands with joy.

“Then it is indeed I who will have brought you here,” she cried. “That is right. Oh, cousin, don’t you know, this is the enchanted garden, my garden! Ah, you did not know that, lord of Bindon! You deemed it was yours perhaps, though you never bethought yourself even of visiting it. But it was given to me by a fairy, years and years ago. And it is full of spells and dreams and magic! I will tell you something: That night, when I came back last autumn ... the first thing I did when I went to my room was to open my window that gives on the garden—you see that window there—and I leant out over the whispering ivy leaves to greet my garden.

And in the dark of the night I heard it speak to me. And it said: I am still yours—David, come in!”

With one of his unconsciously courtly gestures to mark that it was indeed on her invitation that he came upon her ground, he entered slowly, looking at her with a little wonder. For this fantastic Ellinor was as new to him as this day’s dawn. She guessed his thoughts.

“I vow,” she said and seemed to shake off her fancy as she might have brushed from before her face a floating gossamer—“I vow that I am becoming infected with some musing sickness! But between you, my cousin star-gazer, and my good alchemist father, it were odd if there were no such humour in the air. Hold my basket, dear David, I will be practical again.”

# BOOK II — CHAPTER II _EUPHROSINE_, STAR-OF-COMFORT

CHAPTER II *EUPHROSINE*, STAR-OF-COMFORT

She still took note that, when the living smile Died from his lips, across him came a cloud Of melancholy severe; from which again, Whenever in her hovering to and fro, The lily-maid had striven to make him cheer, There brake a sudden beaming tenderness. —TENNYSON (*Elaine*).

“And do you not wish to know,” asked Ellinor, “what has brought me with the dawn to these gardens?”

He had been watching silently by her side—watching her, as here she snipped a bundle of leaves and there a sheaf of blossoms, and mechanically extending the basket that she might lay them therein. Now, after a fashion of his, to which she had grown well accustomed, he let fall a glance upon her as one bringing himself back from a distance.

She repeated her question, with a little pretence of impatience.

“I do not think that I wondered to see you,” he answered slowly.—Fastidious as he was in his garb and every exterior detail that concerned him, it was all as nothing, Ellinor had learned to know, compared to his mental fastidiousness. A silent man he was, but when he spoke no words could serve him but such as could clothe the truth to the most exquisite nicety. Could anyone have been more ill equipped for the battle of life?

“I was standing on the tower,” he went on, “watching the withdrawal of the stars and the rise of another day. It is not often that I look to the earth.

When the stars go, then, you see, the world is blank to me. But this morning, I know not why, when the skies grew faint I did look upon the earth and found it very fair. And so I stood and watched and saw the colours grow. Then you came forth into the midst of them; and somehow I thought it was as if you were part of the beauty of it all—part of the dawn; as if you were something that the earth and I myself had unconsciously been waiting for to complete the whole. Thus you see, Ellinor, it did not enter into my mind to ask why you had come. I sought you," he smiled as he spoke, "also, indeed, I know not why."

As Ellinor listened her white eyelids had fallen over her eyes, lower and lower, till the long lashes, black at the base, upturned and tipped with gold at their ends, cast shadows on her cheek. Her breast heaved with the quickening of her breath. But at the last word she looked up at him, and her eyes were sad.

"Ah, cousin, will you ever know?"

It was almost a cry; it had a ring of hidden bitterness in it. Then, after a slight pause, she resumed her snipping and became once more, as she had announced, practical.

"Well, now you shall be told why I am here. And first, please understand that I combine with my duties of housekeeper to the lord of Bindon, those of 'prentice or familiar to the alchemist—simpler—sorcerer; in short, to Master Simon, my father. Now, as you know," she pursued, assuming a mock orating tone, "my said father spends now all his days and most of his night in extracting divers salts, distilling essences, elixirs, what not—remedies for which the village folk flock to him with enthusiasm, and which being, praise Heaven, harmless enough, are applied to their ills with varying success but entire satisfaction to themselves. These remedies are mostly grown in this garden."

She began to move down the path which led from bed to bed and which no foot but that of the simpler himself, of the dumb boy Barnaby, or her own having hitherto trod, was so narrow and encroached upon by the wild luxuriance of the herbs and shrubs that she was fain to walk in front of him and to speak over her shoulder. And even then, beneath their feet, many a broken and crushed simple gave forth its spicy ghost.

Her face presented itself to him in different aspects every moment. Now he caught but a rim of pearly cheek; now a clear cut profile; now nearly the whole delicate oval narrowed as she turned it towards him over her shoulder, the white chin more pointed. Meanwhile she spoke on gaily, with only here and there a pause to consider, to select and cull.

“I need not tell you, who have known my father so many more years than I myself, that while he makes use of the good old simple writers, Master Gerard, Master Robert Turner, Master Parkinson and the rest, he scoffs at what he calls their superstition. But I, having relieved him from the task of gathering, find it my pleasure to follow the quaint old directions in their least particular. And when Master Gerard, for instance, says, ‘This herb loseth its power unless it be gathered under the rays of the moon in her first quarter’ why then, cousin David,” she laughed, “under the rays of the moon in her first quarter I gather it. Who knows if I do not please thereby some honest ghost? Who knows if there be not in very truth some hidden virtue in the hour? You will have divined that the hour of sunrise is, on the same authority, the only fit season for the culling of certain other precious plants. And so I am here to cull betony and ditander in the dew. (Betony, you must know, sir, is of all simples, except vervaine, the most excellent, so that it is an old say: ‘If you be ill, sell your coat and buy betony.’)”

Here she pushed her way through a bed where thyme had grown breast high. She came back again presently, flushed and be-pearled, merry with the breath of the spices clinging to her garments, and with as much

betony as one hand could hold together. This she added to the basket's burden.

On ran her tongue the while:

"Ah," catching herself up abruptly and retracing her way by a step, "the ditander is also blossoming, I see. Father will be glad to see it. It is sovereign against the wounds of arrows 'shot from guns, and also for the healing of poisoned hurts.' You would never guess," she added, "that the juice of this modest little plant is so powerful that, Master Gerard avers, 'the mere smell of it will drive away venomous beasts and doth astonish them!'" Her laugh rang out, clear as crystal. "You are not convinced, cousin. I would I could see more speculation in that eye! What if I were to tell you that the thing grows under the influence of Mars—would it awaken more interest?"

His grave lip was faintly lifted to a smile.

"It might account at least for its virtue against wounds of arrows," said he.

"Nay, there's sarcasm in that tone," she said, shaking her head. "More respect, I beg of you, Sir David, for this little borage. Does it not look quaint and simple with its baby-blue flowers and its white downy stem? Ah, I warrant me you have had borage in your wine ere this—but you never knew why or how it came there! Oh, sir, it is no less—on authority, mark me—than one of the four great cordial flowers most deserving of esteem for cheering the spirits. The other three are the violet, the rose, and alkanet. And what the alkanet is I should much like to know!"

... "You know so much," he said, "that I have no thought to spare for what you do not know."

“Sarcastic again—take care, cousin! Do not mock at Jupiter’s own cordial. And I tell you more, sir: conjoined with hellebore—black hellebore—that dark and gloomy plant will, as one Robert Burton has it:

‘Purge the veins Of Melancholy and cheer the Heart Of those black fumes that make it smart; And clear the brain of misty fogs Which dull our senses, our souls’ clogs....

“It’s a favourite quotation of my father’s. Would you drink of it, if I brewed it for you?”

There fell a sudden silence—a something dividing their pleasant warmth of sympathy as of a chill breeze blowing between them. And she knew a thoughtless word had struck upon his hidden sore. She stood, as if convicted, with eyes averted from his face. Then he spoke:

“Every man in his youth brews the cup of his own life and spends his age in drinking of it, willy nilly. Sometimes, I think, it is blind fate that has gathered the ingredients to his hand. Sometimes I see they are but the choice of his own perversity. But once brewed, he must drink, be they bitter or sweet.”

“Cousin—” she began timidly. Then, after her woman’s way, courage came to her on a sudden turn of passion: “I’ll not believe it!” she cried, flashing upon him. “Throw the poison away, David. There is glad wine yet in this beautiful world.”

His face relaxed as he looked upon her; the gloomy cloud passed from it. But the melancholy remained.

“Do you remember,” said he, “for I too can quote—what Lady Macbeth says: ‘All the perfumes of Araby cannot sweeten this little hand!’ My bright cousin, believe me, there is a bitterness which no sweetness that ever was distilled, nay, I fear, not even such as you could distil, can ever mitigate. Have you not learned,” he added, and a certain inner agitation

made his lips twitch and the pupils of his eyes dilate and found a distant echo in his voice as of some roaring waters deeply hidden—"have you not learned, over your father's crucibles and phials, that the sweetest essence does but lose its nature and become bitter too for ever, when mingled with but a few drops of the acrid draught. Ellinor, I have warned you already."

She felt as if some cold hand had been laid on her heart:—here spoke again the voice of the sick soul determined to renounce. And here was the one man in her whole world, to whom she would so fain give extravagantly. There are natures to which love means taking only; others to which it means giving all. How she would have given! The ache of the tide thrust back upon her heart rose to her very throat. She went white, even to her brave lips. But still they smiled, as women's lips will smile in such straits.

"You mind me," she said, "that I was after all forgetting to gather the hellebore. 'Tis a dark drug-plant, cousin and loves the shade; and, if the old simplers speak truth, it must be gathered before a ray of sun shall of a morning have opened its green petals. I see that I must hurry. Already the shadow of your grey tower is shortening across the beds."

She took her basket from his arm, gave him a little nod as of dismissal and passed quickly from him. He let her go without a word or a gesture, standing still, wrapt in himself, with eyes downcast. Those deep waters in his soul, that for so many long years had lain black and stagnant—what was it that had so stirred them of late days, that they should rise in waves like the salt and bitter sea and dash against his laboriously built dykes of peace and renunciation?

Ellinor was long on her knees beside the hellebore, not indeed that she was busy picking it, for her hands lay idly before her. With eyes fixed unseeingly upon its dark, poisonous looking tufts, she was tasting the savour of a slow gathering tear. Suddenly she felt her cousin's presence

again close upon her and began feverishly to tear at the plant, every energy of her mind bent upon concealing her weakness. In another moment, with a sweetness that was almost overpowering, she knew that he was kneeling beside her, his shoulder to her shoulder, his hands over hers.

“Dear Ellinor,” he said softly in her ear, “I do not like to see you touch this poisonous plant, let me——” And then, breaking off, when she turned her face, so close to his, as if irresistibly drawn to seek his glance: “Forgive me!” he cried, with more emotion than she had ever heard his measured tones express before. “By what right am I always thus casting upon your happy heart the shadow of my gloom!”

Her fingers closed passionately round his.

“David,” she said, almost in a whisper, “don’t forget I too have known suffering. David you were wrong just now. The sweet and the bitter work together make wholesome beverage. And see, for that do I gather hellebore that it may blend with the borage. Did I not tell you so? And—ah, forgive, but I must say it, sometimes the bitterness and the sorrow are not real, only fancied.... And then it may be that real adversity must come to make us see it. And even then, if we do see it, sweet are the uses of adversity!”

“Why, then, I could believe,” he answered her, and his deep voice still thrilled with that note of emotion that was so inexpressibly musical to her ear, “that if a man were to be comforted by such as you, he might find a sweetness even in adversity—that is,” he added on a yet deeper note, “did he dare let himself be comforted.”

She sighed and dropped her hands from his; took up her basket and rose to her feet. He also rose hastily, as if ashamed of his emotion, and once more wrapped reserve around him like a mantle. Presently he said, in that slightly jesting manner that never lost touch with melancholy:

“Your father has long been looking for the lost ‘Star-of-Comfort.’ Your father is an amiable materialist and believes that a right-chosen drug can minister to a mind diseased. I fear me it will prove to him as frail a quest as that of the Fern Seed of invisibility and the Lotos of forgetfulness—and such like dreams of unattainable good!”

“You are wrong, wrong again!” Although the moisture she scorned to brush away was still in her eyes, the smile was on her lip once more; and the dimple by it—a triumphant dimple.

“How so?” he asked.

“Why, sir, you once were a truer prophet than now you wot of. Did you not foretell to me, on the first day of my return, that I might help him to find it? The lost plant was, according to Master Ralph Prynne (of fragrant memory) well-known at one time in the south of France where, says he, upon diligent search it may even now be discovered among ruins and rocks!” Here she resumed her mock didactic manner. “‘It is my belief,’ says he, ‘that the gay and singularly careless temper of these peoples is due in great part to the ancient custom of brewing it into the wine they did drink of—whereby their sons and daughters did inherit the happy tendencies engendered in themselves—and splenetic melancholy which sits so black on many of our country is never known among them.’”

“A wondrous drug!” said David.

“So I thought,” she retorted; and, with a mocking glance at him, went on: “And knowing how many indeed stand in need of it here, I who had recently come myself from the south of France, resolved to get him the seed or root, if such were to be obtained. Master Prynne gives a very detailed description and I have a good memory. There was one, a wise woman I knew of, who was learned in simples. In fine, sir, turn and behold!”

She twisted him round, led him a pace or two forward, and pointed.

On a shallow bed, sloping to due south, screened from the north and prepared with a kind of rockery clothed with mingled sand and heather soil, a hardy-looking dwarf plant was growing in thick patches. And sundry small but vigorous off-shoots, darting here and there gave promise that they would soon cover the bed and overhang its rocky borders. The full sunshine blazed down upon it, and the minute bright and bold blossoms that gemmed it already in places looked like stars of bluish flame among the lustrous dark green leaves.

“Behold!” repeated Ellinor, with a dramatic gesture.

There was a stimulating aromatic fragrance in the air. The morning sun which had just emerged from the edge of the keep bore down upon them with an effulgence as yet merely grateful. A band of puzzled bees was hovering musically above the last attractive new-comer in the herbary. David looked from the flourishing bed to the straight, strong figure, the brave countenance of his cousin.

“And so you have succeeded,” he said with a look of smiling wonder. “Succeeded where Master Simon has sought in vain so many years! Everything you touch seems to prosper.”

Some realisation of that spirit of gay perseverance which had been so beneficently active in his neglected house all these months, beneath whose influence flowers of order and brightness seemed to have sprung up, magic and fragrant as the lost “Star-of-Comfort” itself, kindled a new light in the eye he now kept fixed upon her. It was a realisation, a sense of admiration, distinct from the ever-present, albeit hardly-conscious attraction. He looked back at the flame-starred creeping shrub.

“So there blooms Master Simon’s True-Grace, this *Euphrosinum*, his Star-of-Comfort, after all these years,” he went on musingly.

And the sense of her presence was intermingled with the penetrating fragrance of the strange flower, the music of bees and bird call, the fanning of the breeze, and the warmth of the sun.

“In Persian,” she resumed, “they call it *Rustian-al-Misrour*—the ‘Plant-of-Heart’s-Joy’ is the meaning of it, so Prynne tells us. It was brought to Europe by the Crusaders, but lost in the destruction of monastery gardens in England, and fell into disuse elsewhere—and thus came to be regarded as a myth. But things are not myths because we lose them,” she added wistfully. “Who knows, sometimes the joy we deem lost is under our hand.” She picked off a branchlet and absently nibbled it. And her light breath, already sweet as of clover or lavender, came wafted across spiced with this new fragrance.

“Well,” said he then slowly, “according to the bygone simplers, there it lies. Ellinor, when you brew me a cordial of the Star-of-Comfort, I shall drink it.”

“I may mind you of that promise one day,” said she.

Then, upon the little pause that ensued, she looked at the shortening shadows and the skies and said, in her womanly, careful manner, that it was time for her to be in the dairy. At the garden gate, however, he paused.

“And under the influence of what star,” he asked, “is the wondrous plant supposed to bloom?”

She could not guess from his manner whether he spoke in jest or in earnest, but she answered him mischievously, as she turned the key in the lock: “Master Prynne was silent on this point; and nowhere could I find news of it. But we are quite safe, cousin David, for I planted the first cutting myself under your new star.”

He started ever so slightly.

“Did you indeed?” he murmured dreamily.

“But I don’t know its name yet. Tell me, you must have given your new star a name by now—for I think it grows brighter night by night.”

In silence he let his deep gaze rest for a moment upon her, then answered:

“To me it is still nameless, though meaning things beyond words.”

He paused, and went on, still compassing her with his absorbed look. “You and the star came to me together—shall I not call it also,” with a gesture at the flowering bed, “Euphrosine—Star-of-Comfort?”

These words, accompanied by the glance that seemed to give them so earnest a significance, troubled Ellinor strangely. She could find no response. She drew the key from the lock and was moving forward with downcast eyes when he laid his touch lightly upon her arm.

“Thank you,” said he, “for admitting me into your enchanted garden! Some morning when the dawn birds are calling, or some evening before the stars come out, may I knock at this gate again?”

“Nay, David,” cried she, with swift uplifted eyes, holding out to him the key on the impulse of her leaping heart, “this gate must never be locked for you! My father has another—take this one!”

His fingers closed upon her hand and then he took the brown key and looked at it.

“For you and me alone,” he said.

She knew then that this hour they had spent together in the dew-besprinkled closes was to him as sacred and as sweet as it would ever be to her. But now he had folded his lips together and went beside her in silence.

# BOOK II — CHAPTER III A QUEEN OF CURDS AND CREAM

## CHAPTER III A QUEEN OF CURDS AND CREAM

And Enid brought sweet cakes to make them cheer, · · · · · And stood behind and waited ... And seeing her so sweet and serviceable, Geraint had longing in him evermore To stoop and kiss the tender little thumb That crost the trencher as she laid it down. —TENNYSON (*Idylls*).

At the end of the lane, Ellinor took the path which branched off to the courtyards; and, as she made no movement of farewell or dismissal, the master of the place, with great simplicity, followed her. These courtyards were located in the most ancient part of Bindon, where in mediæval days had been the inner bailey. What remained of the lowered towers and curtains had been utilised for the peaceful purposes of spences, bakehouses and dairies.

As in the case of all buildings, the life of which has gradually dwindled, these precincts had gathered to themselves a mellow and placid picturesqueness. Long tranquil years had clothed them with luxuriance. It was as if the green tide of surrounding nature had taken delight in reconquering the whilom bare array of stone and mortar. Rampant ivies and wild creeping plants had long ago stormed the half-razed ramparts from the outside, and unchecked in their assault now pounced into the yards over the roofs. On the inside the blush roses were foaming up the grey walls; the square of grass in this shaded spot was deeply green.

In the early light and the silence it was a scene of singular placidity and fitted well with David’s unwontedly pleasant mood; mood of tired body and vaguely happy mind. A few pigeons from the high-reared cot came fluttering down and walked about, curtseying expectantly.

Presently two milk-maids, in print frocks, sun bonnets and clogs, clattered down some stairs and went in quickly through the dairy door, agitated at perceiving the task-mistress up before them. Their entrance broke the musing spell of the two unavowed lovers. As they drew near the open door of the house, the cool breath of the dairy—a sort of cowslip breath, of much cleanliness, mingled with the faintly acrid sweetness of the milk—came to their nostrils. A row of shining pails were ranged upon the low stone bench just outside the door. A lad and maid hurried past, each carrying two more foaming buckets.

Ellinor now became the decided, almost stern, mistress of household matters. She counted the milk pails and gave an order to each maid, who curtseyed and stood at attention, but could not keep a roving, awestruck eye from the unwonted spectacle of their master.

“Rosemary, three pails for the dairy, as usual. Two for the house: up with them, Kate! Sally, back to your skimming as soon as you have filled the steward’s can and carried in the pail for the parish dole out of the sunshine. Stay a moment,” her tone and manner altered, “leave one of those here—Cousin David, have you broken your fast? Of course not! Then you and I, shall we not do so now together? Nay, I shall be disappointed if you refuse. You have made me queen of these realms—the ‘queen of curds and cream,’ as Doctor Tutterville calls me—and all must obey me here!”

There was a stone porch jutting forth over the side door that led into the passage. Within this refuge, on either side, was set a stone bench under an unglazed ogee window. Honeysuckle had intermingled its growth with that of the climbing roses, and made there a parlour of perfume. Hither Ellinor conducted the lord of Bindon, and here he allowed himself to be installed, obeying her as one who walks in dreams and is glad to dream on.

The maids had parted in noisy flight, each on her different errand, starched gowns crackling, clogs clacking, pails clinking as they went. Ellinor threw down her cloak and her basket and disappeared, light as the lapwing, rejoicing with all a woman's joy to minister to the beloved. She returned with a little wooden table, which, smiling, she set before him and was gone again. This time it was out into the yard and into the dairy, and her head flashed in a sun-shaft. When she reappeared, she was walking more slowly, and between her hands was a yellow glazed bowl brimming with new-drawn milk.

"For you, Sir David," she said.

It was foaming and fragrant of clover blossom as he lifted it to his lips.

"And now," she went on, "you shall taste of my baking. I had a batch set last night and the rolls ought to be crisp to a touch."

The following minute brought her back, flushed and triumphant, bearing on a tray a smoking brown loaflet, a ray of amber honey and a rustic basket full of strawberries. She paused a second reflectively, and cried:

"A pat of fresh-churned butter!"

And again his eyes watched her cross the shaft of sunshine and come back, and they were the eyes of a man gazing on a dear and lovely picture.

"Now, David, is this not a breakfast fit for a king?"

He looked at the table and then at her; and then put down the loaf his long fingers had been absently crushing.

"And you?" he asked and rose. "You—the queen?"

"I? Oh, I think I forgot myself. Oh, don't get up, David. Don't, please! You cannot imagine how much refreshed I shall feel when you have eaten. There, then, I will sit beside you. But as there is no pleasure in

waiting upon oneself, I must call up a court menial. Katy! A bowl of milk for me. Rosemary, another roll from the oven!”

This was to remain a memory of gold in Ellinor’s life. Poets may sing as they will of the joys of mutual love confessed. But there is an hour more exquisite yet in man and woman’s life: the hour of love still untold. The hour of trembling hopes and uncertainties; of ecstasies hidden away in the inmost sanctuary of the being; of dreams so much more beautiful than reality; of thoughts that no words can clothe and music that no instrument can render. Hour of doubt which is to certainty as the dawn is to the day, as mystery is to revelation: as much more enthralling, as much more exquisite.

Even as the soul is constrained by the body, so must the ideal thought lose of its fragrance when limited to the spoken word. But the very condition of life’s tenure urges us to hasten ever onwards towards the success of attainment. We may not sit and taste the full sweetness of the present because our foreseeing nature and old Time are spurring us on, on! This present of ours is fleeting enough, God knows. Yet the miserable restlessness within us robs us of the minute even while it is ours. Thus the most perfect things in our lives will ever be a memory. But when the golden hours have all tolled for us, when the flowers are all withered, at least we can look back and say: “That was my sunrise hour. ... That was my perfect rose!”

They spoke little to each other, but Ellinor saw the lines of melancholy fade out of his face and become replaced by soft restfulness. Tired he looked, the watcher of the night, in the broad radiance of the day, but happy. It was as if the fatigue itself brought a sense of peace, lulling him to dreaminess and depriving him of the energy to fight against the sweetness of the moment.

Suddenly, with the light tread of a cat, the squat figure of Mrs. Nutmeg, in her decent widow’s black and her snowy mutch, came upon them from

the house. She paused with a start of such extreme surprise that it was in itself an impertinence, and the more galling because it could not be resented. Ignoring the scarlet-cheeked Ellinor, the housekeeper dropped her curtsey and offered ostentatious excuses to Sir David.

“I humbly ask your pardon, sir. Indeed, sir, I had no idea, or I would not have made so bold as to intrude. I hope, sir, you’ll forgive me for disturbing you at such a moment!”

Her eye roved as she spoke over the disordered table, aside to Ellinor’s cloak and the basket of withering herbs; then back to Ellinor herself, where it deliberately measured every detail—the dusty shoe, the green stains on the gown, the flushed brow, the disordered hair.

Her unconscious master waved his hand a little impatiently with his formal “Good morrow,” that was more a dismissal than a greeting. Mrs. Nutmeg returned Sir David’s brief salutation with another unctuous curtsey. Withdrawing her glance from Ellinor, she fixed it upon his face, with a vain attempt to throw an expression of tender solicitude into the opaque white and the meaningless black of her eye.

“Excuse the liberty, sir,” she began again, “but do you feel quite yourself this morning? It do go to my heart to see how drawn and ill you be looking! I fear these last months, sir, you haven’t been as usual. Not at all. More has remarked it than myself.”

Ellinor rose.

“It’s getting late, Margery,” she said, “and the cream is not skimmed yet. Ring the bell for the girls.”

“Yes, ma’am,” Margery curtseyed, her eyes still clinging unwaveringly to her master’s face. This was now turned upon her with a sudden frown.

“Do you not hear?” said Sir David.

They robbed him freely in his absence, this household of his, but none could forget in his presence that he was master.

“Yes, sir, yes ma’am. I ask your pardon,” said Mrs. Nutmeg.

And this time there was flurry in her step as she moved away, her list slippers padding on the flags. She cast not another glance behind her; yet Ellinor felt chilled, she knew not why. Upon the dial that had marked her warm-tinted hour a grey shadow had fallen. She took up her basket of herbs. Most of the perishable things were already withering, but the dry vivacious stems of the Star-of-Comfort flaunted their glossy leaves and their tiny brilliant blossom undimmed. She noticed this, and was superstitiously glad.

“I must go, cousin,” she said, “but later, if you will, I shall come and help on with the new chart.”

She nodded and left him. As she moved across the courtyard towards her father’s den, the maids, hustling each other as they clacked into the dairy, looked after her with inimical stare. Then one whispered to the other, and the other nudged back, while the third surreptitiously shook her mottled fist. And as Ellinor walked on with steady step she knew it all. She knew that “the Queen of curds and cream” sat on an insecure throne; and that, were the power that had placed her there to be withdrawn from her, many eager hands would be stretched out to pull her into the mire.

But upon the first step leading down to the laboratory, she turned and cast a glance back: in the deep shadow of the porch David was still standing. Out of the dark face the light eyes were watching her; when she turned, he smiled and waved his hand. And her spirits rose again as she ran down the stairs, to begin her long round of various work. She had stuck a sprig of the Euphrosinum in her kerchief; and during the whole day, whether over crucible or household book, in linen closet or still-room, each time the scent of it was wafted to her nostrils there came and went upon her

lips a little secret smile, as if the fragrant thing on her bosom were but the symbol of some inner fragrance rising in little fitful storms from her heart.

# BOOK II — CHAPTER IV OPEN-EYED CONSPIRACY

CHAPTER IV OPEN-EYED CONSPIRACY

Let me loose thy tongue with wine:

No, I love not what is new: She is of the ancient house, And I think we know the hue Of that cap upon her brows! —TENNYSON (*Vision of Sin*).

Old Giles, in the plate-room! Old Giles, butler of Bindon and confidential servant to Sir David, sunk in his wooden armchair and his head inclined till his double chin rested on his greasy stock, surveying with distasteful eye the mug of small-ale on the table before him.

A stout old man with a reddening nose may be no unpleasant picture if superabundance of flesh and misplacement of carmine bear witness to jollity and good cheer; but oh lamentable spectacle if melancholy droop that ruby nose; if fat cheeks hang disconsolate! Then for every added ounce of avoirdupois is added a pound of misery. Your melancholy thin man is fitted by nature to bear his burden, but the sad fat man seems to deliquesce, to collapse—so much in his case is affliction against the obvious design of nature!

From the inner pantry door Margery stood a moment and contemplated her fellow servant awhile, with an air of deeper commiseration than her usually set visage was wont to express. Then she carefully closed the door and advanced to the table. In her rolled up apron she was clasping something with both hands.

“Eh,” she said, in a long drawn note, “it do go to my heart, Mister Giles, to see you so cast down!”

The butler rolled his lack-lustre eye from the mug of beer to the housekeeper's countenance; then his underlip began to tremble.

"Ah," he answered, "that stuff is killing me, Mrs. Nutmeg. The cold of it on my stomach! It'll creep up to my heart some of these nights, it will! And that will be the end of poor old faithful Giles!"

A tear twinkled on his vast cheek. He stretched out his hand for the glass, gulped a mouthful of it and replaced it on the table, drawing down the corners of his mouth into a grimace not unlike that which in an infant heralds a burst of wailing.

"Cold, cruel, poisonous stuff, that lies as heavy as heavy! Half a caskful, ma'am will not stimulate a man as much as half a wineglassful of port-wine or sherry-wine. It's murder—that's what it is!"

"Murder it is," assented Margery. She took the glass and threw its contents into the grate: sympathy personified. Then she began to move about the room with an air of so much mystery that Giles' attention was faintly roused in something external to himself and to the odiousness of small-ale.

Mrs. Nutmeg went to the pantry door, listened a moment with stooped head, then released her right hand from the enfolded object and turned the key in the lock. Stepping to the high-set window, she next squinted east and west, as if to make sure that no watchers were about; then returned to the table, slowly unrolled her apron and displayed to the butler's astonished gaze a black bottle, cobwebbed, dust-crusted, red-sealed—a bottle of venerable appearance and, to the initiated, of Olympian promise. With infinite precaution she tilted it into a vertical position and placed it on the table, displaying in so doing the dusty streak of whitewash which had marked the upper side of its repose these twenty years. Into old Giles' expressionless stare leaped a light of rapturous recognition.

“The Comet port, by gum! The port from the fifth bin!”

He raised himself in his chair and, as if sight were not enough for conviction, began with trembling hands to caress the bottle, and smacking his lips as if the taste were already upon them. Margery surveyed him with her head slightly on one side.

“How—how did you get it?” he babbled, now sniffing at the seal, his red nose laid fondly first on one side then on the other.

“Never you mind,” said she, “I’m not the one to stand by and see old service drove to death by stinginess nor yet by interference. There’s more where it came from.”

“The last bottle we drank together,” interrupted he, “was the first to break in upon the sixth dozen. Six dozen, minus one, seventy-one bottles. That makes——”

“Seventy bottles still,” said she. “Enough to warm your heart again for many a long day.” She stooped, and whipped out a corkscrew from one of her capacious pockets.

“Give me that bottle, Mister Giles.”

She lifted it from his grasp. He raised his hands, protesting, quivering.

“For Heaven’s sake, don’t shake it, ma’am! Don’t shake it! It’s thirty year old, if it’s a day. Oh, Lord, Mrs. Nutmeg, give it to me, ma’am!”

She cast one swift, contemptuous glance upon him.

“I think my wrist is steadier than yours,” she remarked drily, while with the neatest precision she inserted the point of the corkscrew into the middle of the seal.

“’Tis the yale,” he palpitated.

“Oh, aye,” said she, “the ale, of course.” She smiled in her sleek way while she turned the corkscrew. “Here,” she added, “is what will steady them for a while at any rate.”

The cork came forth with a chirp that once more brought the fire to the toper’s eye.

“Ho, ho!” he cried, every crease in his face that had before spelt despondency now wreathing rapture.

“Wait a bit,” she bade him, still keeping her strong hand on the bottle neck. She dived into the left pocket and brought forth a short cut-glass beaker. “You’re not going,” said she, “to drink Sir David’s Comet port out of a mug!”

She poured it out, gently tilting the venerable bottle. He could hardly wait till the gorgeous liquid garnet had brimmed to the edge, before grasping the glass. But palsied as his hands were not a drop did they spill. A mouthful first, to let the taste of it lie on his palate; another to roll round his tongue; then unctuously, as slowly as was compatible with the act of swallowing, the ichor of the grape destined to warm a high-born heart and to illumine the workings of a noble mind, was sent to kindle the base fires of Sir David’s thieving old servant.

“Ah!”

He took a deep-drawn breath of utter satisfaction, reached for the bottle, boldly poured himself forth another glass and drank again. Motionless, the woman watched.

“As good a bottle,” said he garrulously, “as ever came out of the bin! ’Twas of the laying of the good Sir Everard—Sir David’s grandfather, you mark, Mrs. Nutmeg. You wasn’t in these parts then. Ah, a judge of wine he was. I tell ye I could pick every drop he had bottled blindfold this minute, at the first taste. He and Master Rickart, Lord, what wild

times they had together! Ah, he was a blade in those days, was old Rickart. Now——'Tis well there's someone left at Bindon that knows the valley of precious liquor, for it's been disgusting, I assure you, ma'am. There's master had nothing but the light clary—French stuff—and not known the differ these five years! Well, well, 'twould have broken Sir Everard's heart, but"—piously, "there's one left as remembers him and his tastes. May I offer you a thimbleful, Mrs. Nutmeg? 'Tis as good as a cordial!"

He was once more the man of importance: the steward dispensing his master's goods with a fine air of hospitality.

"No, Mister Giles, I thank you kindly," said the lady. Then she measured him again with one of her deep looks, marked the hand which he was stretching out for the port and suddenly whipped the desired object from its reach. Her calculated moment had come.—The butler's limbs had lost their palsied trembling and there was some kind of speculation in his eye.

"No, Mister Giles," she said, as he gaped at her. "I came here for a little chat, if you please. You're feeling more yourself again?"

The memory of his injuries, forgotten for the brief span of ecstasy, returned in full force. His lip drooped.

"Aye, ma'am, a little, a little. But I am sadly weak."

He pushed his glass tentatively forward, but she ignored the hint.

"I thought you was a-dying by inches before my eyes," she announced deliberately.

The red face opposite to her grew mottled grey and purple. Mr. Giles began to whimper:

"So I was, ma'am. So I be!"

Margery sat down and, clasping the bottle with both her determined hands, leaned her head on one side of it.

“Another month of small-ale,” she said, “would bring you to your grave, Mister Giles. Aye, you may groan. How many bottles be left of this old port? Seventy ye said. And there be as good besides.”

“The East India sherry,” said he, the light of his one remaining interest flickering up again in the aged sockets. “Oh, it’s a beauty, that wine is! As dry, ma’am, and as mellow!” He smacked his tongue. “And there’s the Madeiry, got at the Dook of Sussex’s sale. ‘Royal wine,’ says Sir Everard to me. And Royal wine it is! But you know the taste of it yourself. Then there are the Burgundy bins. Women folk,” said Mr. Giles, “have that inferiority, they can’t appreciate red wine. But there’s Burgundy down in my cellars that I’d rather go to bed on a bottle of as even of the Comet port.”

Margery broke in with a short laugh.

“Yes, yes,” said she; “I’ll warrant there is good stuff in your cellars. But who’s got the key of them now, if I may make so bold?”

Once again the toper was brought up to the sense of present limitations as by the tug of a merciless bit cunningly handled. With open mouth and starting eyes he paused, and the dark, senile blood rushed up to his face. Then he struck the table with his hand:

“That vixen of old Rickart’s, blast her!”

“And he—the daft old gentleman,” Margery’s voice dropped soft, as oil trickling down to fire, “eating the bread of charity, one may say, without so much as doing a stroke of work to save the shame of it!”

“Blast him!” cried Giles, with another thump.

“Oh, yes, when I brought you that bottle, I told you there was more where it came from. But the question is, who’s to have it, Mr. Giles! Is it all to be for that clever young lady and her crazy old father—that’s come like cuckoos to settle at Bindon, and bamfoozle that poor innocent gentleman, Sir David, and oust us as has served him so faithful and so long?”

“No, no, no!” cried old Giles, “blast ’em, blast ’em!”

Margery put her finger to her lip with a long drawn “Hush!” and glanced warningly round the room, though indeed, stronghold as it was, there was little fear of the sound escaping to the outer world. She then poured out a measured half glass and pushed it towards the butler, corked the bottle, placed it on the top of the safe; and betaking herself once again to her inexhaustible pockets, drew forth one after another and set in their turn upon the table a small unopened bottle of ink, a goose quill pen, of which she tested the nib, and a large sheet of paper, which she unfolded and smoothed.

“Now, Mr. Giles,” said she sharply.

He was absently sucking his empty glass and started to look upon her preparations uncomprehendingly.

“You write a fine hand,” said she, picking the stopper out of the inkpot with the point of the corkscrew.

“Ah,” said he, “my cellar book was a sight to see! It’s lain useless these six months. But so long,” he said, proudly but sadly, “as I kept the keys no one can say but as I kept the book.”

So he had indeed, with a quaint fidelity; and amazing reading it would have proved to the casual inspector, who would have founded wild opinions of Sir David’s and his cousin’s prowesses in the matter of toping.

“Do you want the keys back?” asked Margery, in a quiet whisper, “or is this to be the last bottle of port you’ll ever taste?”

He stared at her, his moist lip working. She seemed to find the answer sufficient, for she motioned him into his seat.

“Then you sit down and write,” said she, “and I promise you Bindon shall get his rights again, and our good master’s quiet, comfortable house be rid of her that brings no good to it.”

Giles sat down submissively, dipped the quill into the ink, manipulated it with the flourish of the proud penman; then, squaring his wrists flat on the sheet, prepared to start.

“I’d never have troubled you,” explained Margery, apologetically, “had I had your grand education, Mr. Giles.”

“Who be I to write to?” said Giles, with the stern air of the male mind controlling the female one, as it would wander from the point.

Again Margery whispered, not for fear of listeners, but to give the allurement of mystery to her purpose:

“To the Lady Lochore,” said she.

The pen dropped from Giles’ fingers, making a great blot at the top of the sheet, which Margery, with clacking tongue, deftly mopped up with a corner of her apron. Consternation and awe wrote themselves on the butler’s face. Faithless old ingrate as he was, robbing with remorseless system the hand that fed him, something of family spirit, some sense of clanship, still existed in his muddled mind. Enough of their master’s secrets had filtered to the household for everyone to know that his only sister had wedded the man who, under the pretending cloak of friendship, had done him mortal injury; and that from the moment she had thus given herself to his enemy, the lord of Bindon had cut her off from his life. But there were things beside, which old Giles alone knew; which he had kept

to himself, even after his long devotion to the Bindon cellars had wreaked havoc upon the intelligence of his conscience.

It was but ten years back when a mounted messenger had brought the tidings to Sir David of the birth of an heir to the house of Lochore: heir also, as matters now stood, to the childless house of Bindon. Giles had conducted this messenger to Sir David's presence. Giles had stood by and watched his master's pale face grow death livid as he listened to the envoy's tale, had seen him recoil from even the touch of his kinsman's letter. It was Giles who had received the curt instructions: "Take the messenger away, give him food, rest and drink, and let him ride and bear back to Lord Lochore that letter he has sent me." And now old Giles looked up into Margery's inscrutable face, and cried with echoes of forgotten loyalty in his husky voice:

"Write to Miss Maud?—to my Lady, I mean. Nay, nay, Mrs. Nutmeg, I'll not do that!"

"Ah," said Mrs. Nutmeg.

She had been standing over his shoulder, showing more eagerness than her wont, and licking her lips over the words she was about to dictate to him, while a light shone in her eyes that was never kindled so long as she was under observation. At the check of his words the old sleek change came over her. The curtain of impassiveness fell over her countenance. The gleam went out in her eyes. She came quietly round, sat down, opposite him and, folding her hands, let them rest on the table before her.

"Ah," said she, "it do go again the grain, don't it, Mr. Giles? And if it was not for Sir David——"

Giles meanwhile, having pushed the writing materials on one side, had risen and helped himself freely again to the Comet port, drinking courage to his own half-repented resolution, a babble of disjointed phrases escaping from him in the intervals of his gulps. "No, he could not go

against Sir David—poor old man, not many years to live—served his father's father. Eh, and Sir Edmund had put him into these arms; and he but a babe—the greatest toper in the house, says Sir Edmund..." Here there was a chuckle and a tear, and a fresh glass poured out.

Margery never blinked towards the bottle. Unfolding her hands, she presently began to smooth out the writing paper, and by-and-bye began to speak. At first it was a merely soothing trickle of talk. No one knew Mr. Giles' high-mindedness and nobility of character better than she did; though, indeed, she herself was but a new-comer at Bindon, compared to him—the third of his generation in the service of the house, and himself the servant of three Cheveral masters. By-and-bye, from this primrose path of flattery she turned aside into less smooth ground. Something she said of the real duties of old service, of the mistaken duty of blind submission. There was a dark hint of Sir David's helplessness, a prey to designing intruders—"and him as easy to cheat as a child!" A tear here welled to Mistress Margery's eyelid; there was no doubt she spoke as one whose knowledge was first hand.

Mister Giles knew best, of course; but, in her humble opinion, it was an old servitor's bounden duty to let their master's nearest relative know. Here Margery became very dark again; things are so much more terrible when merely hinted at. The butler's hand halted with the sixth glass on the way to his lips; he put it down again untasted.

"Who's to look after Master, I should like to know?" asked Margery boldly, "when you and I and all the old faithful folk is turned out of Bindon, and that deep young lady and Master Rickart reign alone, with their poisons and their powders?"

"By gum!" cried Giles, with a shout, thumping the table, so that the precious wine this time slopped over its barrier. "By gum! hand me that paper, and say your say, ma'am, and I'll write it!"

The man was just tipsy enough already to be easily worked up, and unable to analyse the means by which his passion was roused; not too tipsy to be a perfectly capable instrument in the housekeeper's hands.

The following was the letter that Giles, the butler of Bindon, wrote to "the Lady Lochore," at her house in London:

MY LADY.—Trusting you will excuse the liberty and in the hopes this finds your Ladyship well, as is the humble wish of the writer. My Lady, I have not been the servant of your Ladyship's brother, my most honoured master, Sir David Cheveral of Bindon, without knowing the sad facts of family divisions between yourself and Sir David. But, my Lady, wishing to do my duty by my master, as has always been my humble endeavour, I should consider myself deaf to the Voice of Conscience, did I not take the pen this day to let you know the state of affairs at Bindon at this present time.

Master Rickart's daughter, Mistress Marvel, has come back to Bindon, to live, and my Lady, she and her father is now master and mistress here. Sir David being such as my Lady knows he is, different from other people, is no match for such.

My Lady, what the end of it will be no one can tell. None of us like to think of it. What is said in the village and all over the country already, is what I must excuse myself from writing, not being fit for your Ladyship's eyes. But as your Ladyship's father's old and trusted servant, I am doing no less than my bounden duty, in warning your Ladyship.

Here Margery had halted, and flouted several eager suggestions on the part of the faithful butler, who was anxious to mention poisons and phials and black practises, who, moreover, had wished to introduce after every sentence a detailed account of the unmerited cruelty practised upon himself in forcing him to give up the keys of the family cellar, and express his intimate persuasion of the restlessness thereby caused to the

good Sir Everard's bones in their honoured grave. But Margery was firm; and now, after due reflection, sternly commanded Mr. Giles' respects and signature. When this flourishing signature at length adorned the page, Margery laid a flat finger below it.

"Write: Post-Scriptum," ordered she. "I humbly trust your Ladyship's little son is well. There was great joy among us when we heard of his honoured birth. We was, up to now, all used to think of him as the heir to Bindon."

Here she hesitated again; but finally, true to her instinct that suggestion is more potent than explanation, demanded the folding of the letter, its addressing and sealing. The latter duty she undertook herself, with the help of the inexhaustible bag. And as she laid her thumb on the hot wax, she smiled, well content, and allowed Giles to finish the bottle and drown any possible misgivings.

As she left the room to watch for the post-boy, and herself place the fruit of her morning labour in the bag, Giles, with tipsy gravity and mechanical neatness, was posting his too long disused cellar book up to date:

June 24th., 1823. Comet Port. Bin V. Bottle: One.

# BOOK II — CHAPTER V EVIL PROMPTER, JEALOUSY

## CHAPTER V EVIL PROMPTER, JEALOUSY

Great bliss was with them and great happiness Grew, like a lusty flower, in June's caress. —KEATS (*Pot of Basil*).

July over the meadows, sweeter in death than in life, where the long grass lay in swathes and the bared earth split and crumbled under the fierce sun. July in the great woods, with leaves at their deepest green, nobly still against the noble still azure, throwing blocks of green shade in the mossy aisles and wondrous grey designs of leaf and branch on the hardened ground. July in the drowsy hum of the laden bee; in the birds' silence and the insects' orchestra—those undertones of sounds—everywhere; July in the sweet hearted rose, in the plenitude of summer fulfilment. July over garden and cornfield and purple moor....

So it had been all day, a long, gorgeous day, busy and yet lazy, full to the brim of nature's slow, ripe work. And now the evening had come; the fires of the sunset had cooled and a deep-bosomed sky had begun to brood over the teeming earth, lit only by the sickle of a young moon that had hung, ghost-like, in the airs the whole afternoon.

The fields of heaven were yet nearly as bare of stars as the meadows of their murdered flowers; but here and there, with a sudden little leap like a kindling lamp, some distant sun—white Vega or ruddy Arcturus—began to send its gold or silver messages across the firmament where the summer sun of our world held lingering monarchy.

Ellinor had spent a long hot day in the parsonage, helping that pearl of housewives, Madam Tutterville, with the potting of cherry jam. She had

come home across the fields with lagging step, drawing in the luxury of the evening silence, the cool fragrance of the woods, the beauties of the advancing night. She bore, as an offering, a handsome basketful of rectory peaches, over which her soul was grateful: a proper dish to set before him in whose service she took her joy.

On re-entering the house, according to her usual wont, she at first sought her father, but found the laboratory empty of any presence save that of the herb-spirits singing in the throat of the retort. She made no doubt then but that the simpler had sought the star-gazer's high seat.

One result of her presence at Bindon had been the gradual drawing together of the two men, with herself as a centring link. David was more prone to come down from his tower and her father to come up from his vault. And she took a sweet and secret pleasure in the quite unconscious sense of grievance they would both display when her duty or her mood took her for any length of time away from either of them.

As she reached the foot of the tower stairs a hand was placed upon her arm. She turned with that irrepressible inner revulsion which always heralded to her Margery's presence.

"Asking your pardon, ma'am," came the usual silky formula, "may I inquire if you are going up to see my master?"

"To be sure," answered Ellinor quietly, though she blushed in the dark. "Do you not see that I am going up to the tower?"

"Yes, ma'am," said Mrs. Nutmeg, humbly. "I made so bold as to trouble you, ma'am, not wishing to intrude upon my master myself. The postman left a letter, ma'am."

Mrs. Nutmeg drew the object in question from under her black silk apron. Very white it shone in the gloom:—a large, oblong folded sheet, with a black blotch in the centre where sprawled an enormous seal.

“This letter, ma’am,” she repeated, “came this evening. Would you be good enough to hand it yourself to my master?”

Ellinor had a superstitious feeling that Margery Nutmeg was one day, somehow, destined to bring misfortune upon her; and it was this perhaps which always left her discomfited after even the most trivial interview with the housekeeper. But determinedly shaking off the sensation, she slipped the letter in her basket and began the ascent of the rugged stairs. No matter how tired she might be, her foot was always light when it led her to the tower, because her impatient heart went on before.

Leaving the basket in the observatory, she retained the letter in her hand, instinctively avoiding any scrutiny of its superscription, although seen here in the lamplight the thought did strike her that it looked like a woman’s writing. Sir David’s correspondence, as she knew, was so scanty that the sealed missive might indeed mean an event in their lives; and now the present was too full of delicate happiness for her to welcome anything that might portend change.

She stood for a moment on the threshold of the platform, looking out on the two figures silhouetted against the sky. Her father, as usual in his gown, seated on the stone ledge of the parapet, was speaking. David, leaning against the wall with folded arms, was looking down at him. Master Simon’s chuckle, followed by the rare low note of the star-gazer’s laughter, fell upon her ear.

“I do assure you,” the old man was saying, “it was the very surliest fellow in the whole of Bindon village. A complete misanthropist, a perfect curmudgeon! The poor woman would come to me in tears, with sometime a black eye, sometime a swollen lip—I have known her actually cut about the occiput. ‘My poor creature,’ I would say to her, ‘plaster your wound I can, but alter your husband’s humours is at present beyond my power.’”

“Not having yet re-discovered the ‘Star-of-Comfort,’” interrupted David.

The sound of that voice, gently sarcastic and indulgently mocking, had become so dear to Ellinor that she lingered yet for the mere chance of indulging her ear again unobserved.

“Not having then re-discovered the *Euphrosinum*,” corrected Master Simon, with emphasis on the word “then.” “But that excellent young woman, my daughter, has been of service to me there.”

“She has been of service everywhere.”

This tribute brought joy to the listener. Forced by the turn the conversation was taking to disclose her presence, she emerged upon the platform, but took a seat beside her father’s in silence, the letter for the moment quite forgotten in her pocket.

“Ah, there is Ellinor!”

Sir David had seen her coming first and was the first to greet her. She thought, she hoped, there was gladness in the exclamation.

“Eh, eh!” said Master Simon. “Back from the prophetess’s jam-pots?” He fondled the hand she had laid on his knee. “Did the virtuous woman open her mouth with wisdom, while you, my girl, girded your loins with strength? We were talking of you, my girl. Ah, David, did I not do well for both you and me, when I craved house-room at Bindon for this Exception-to-her-Sex?”

David did not answer. But in the gloom she felt his eye upon her, and her heart throbbed. Master Simon, after a little pause, resumed the thread of his discourse.

“Ha, I am a mass of selfishness, a mass of selfishness! And the plant of True Grace is found; the *Euphrosinum* is found, Sir David Cheveral. Found, planted, culled and tested.” The utmost triumph was in his

accents. “Aye, my dear young man, you will be rejoiced to hear that the effects of this most precious of simples have in no wise been overrated by the writers of old. They have far exceeded my most sanguine expectation. Why, sir, I said to myself: this fellow, this John Cantrip with his evil spleen, he has been marked by destiny for the first experiment. I prepared a decoction, making it duly palatable (for if you will remember your natural history, even bears like honey), I bade the poor, much-tried wife—he had just deprived her of both her front teeth—place a spoonful daily in his morning draught. That was a week ago. She came here this morning ... you will hardly credit it——”

The speaker paused, became absorbed in a delightful memory and began to laugh softly to himself. And the infection again gained the listener.

“Well, sir, has the bear turned to lamb? And is the dame content with the metamorphosis?”

“You will hardly credit it,” repeated the simpler, rubbing his hands, “the silly woman was beside herself with the most intemperate passion. There was no sort of abuse she did not heap upon me. She swears I have bewitched her husband and that she will have the law of me. He, he! You must know, David, the fellow is a carpenter; and, although his tempers were objectionable, he was a good worker. Indeed, I gather that the exasperated condition of his system found relief in the constant hammering of nails, punching of holes, sawing and planing of hard substance. But now——” Again delighted chuckle and mental review took the place of speech.

“Well?” asked Sir David. His tone was broken with an undercurrent of laughter. Ellinor smiled in her dark corner. She compared this David, interested and amused in human matters, pleasant of intercourse himself and appreciative of another’s company, to the man of taciturn moods and melancholy, who fed on his own morbid thought and fled from his fellow

men—to the David of but a few months ago. She knew it was her woman's presence that had, as if unconsciously, wrought the change.

"Well?" said Sir David again.

"My dear fellow," cried Master Simon, breaking into a louder cackle. "John Cantrip, as you say, has changed from a bear into a lamb; at least from a sullen, dangerous animal into an exceedingly pleasant, light-hearted one. He sings, he whistles, he laughs—all that cerebral congestion, that nervous irritation, has been soothed away under the balmy influence of this valuable plant. The excellent creature is able to take delight in his life, in the beautiful objects of Nature around him. He admires the blue sky, he rejoices in the seasonable heat, he embraces his spouse—he will hang over his infant's cradle and express a tender, paternal desire to rock him to slumber. Every happy instinct has been wakened, every morose one lulled. Would I could induce the government of this land to enforce in each parish the cultivation of *Euphrosinum*. My good sir, we should have no more need of prisons, or stocks, or gallows!"

"And yet you say," quoth David, "that Mrs. Cantrip is dissatisfied."

"Most excellent David, from early days of the earth downwards, the woman was ever the most unreasonable of all God's creatures. She wants the impossible, she wants the perfection of things, which is not of this world. Instead of rejoicing, this foolish person complains."

"Complains?"

"Oh, well, it seems the carpenter is now disinclined for work. I endeavoured to explain to her that the morbid reason for his love of hammering no longer exists. The good fellow is placid and content and an agreeable companion. But the absurd female is tearing her hair! 'What,' said I, 'he has not struck you once since Saturday week, and you do not rejoice?' 'Rejoice!' she screams. 'And he's not struck a nail either.' 'If this happy effect continues,' I assured her, 'you will be able to

keep the remainder of your teeth.' 'I'll have nothing to put between them if it does,' she responds. In vain I represented to her, *mulier*—in short, that I, having done my part, it was now hers to utilise these new dispositions for her own ends. She must beguile him back to his everyday duties with tender smiles and womanly wiles—the female's place in nature being to play this part towards the ruder male. But it was absolutely impossible to get her so much as to listen to me! She vowed that she had lost all patience—which was indeed very patent—that she had even clouted him (as she expressed it), without producing any other result than a smile at her. 'Grins,' says she, 'like a zany!' and with the want of logic of her sex, utterly fails to perceive what a triumphant attestation she is making to the efficacy of my plant."

"It is extremely droll," said David.

"Of course it will at once strike you," pursued the old student, "that the obvious course was to induce the dissatisfied lady to partake of the soothing lotion herself. But, would you believe it? She became more violently abusive than ever at the bare suggestion!"

"Indeed," said Ellinor, interrupting, "not only did she decline to make any acquaintance herself with the remedy, but she brought back the jar, with all that was left of our infusion, and vowed that she was well punished for dealing with the Devil and his daughter. You know, cousin David, I fear that I am rapidly gaining something of a reputation for black art! I do not mind, of course. Only," she faltered a little, "a child ran from me in the village this morning. I was sorry for that."

David's face grew scornful. Popularity was so poor a thing in his eyes, that popular hate was not, he deemed, worth even a passing thought. But Ellinor, who could not look upon the world from a tower and whose self-allotted tasks lay, of necessity, much among the humble many, had not this lofty indifference. She knew she had already more enemies than friends. And she knew also to what she owed the sowing of this

hostility—not to her association with her father, whose eccentric experiments in pharmacy on the whole worked to the benefit, and gave an extraordinary zest to the lives, of the village community—not to Madam Tutterville's texts; for, indeed, that good lady was so subjugated by her niece's housekeeperly qualifications that she elected for the nonce to be blind to the daughter's abetting of the father's pursuits. Well did Ellinor know to whom it was she owed her growing ill-repute.

Yet the cloud in her sky, no bigger at first than a woman's hand, was growing, she felt, and was sufficient already to cast a shadow. And now, as she sat in such perfect content this summer night between her father and her cousin, her duty and her love, and felt herself a centre of peace and harmony, the mere passing remembrance of Margery sufficed to make her heart contract.

With the thought of Margery, the recollection of her commission leaped up in her mind. She laid the letter on her knee, gazing down at its whiteness a moment or two before she could overcome her extraordinary repugnance to deliver it.

Meanwhile Master Simon was flowing happily on again, quite oblivious of the fact that neither David, whose gaze had once more turned starward, nor his daughter, absorbed in inner reflection, were paying the least heed to his discourse.

"Naturally, poor Cantrip will relapse. And he will hammer wife and nails once more, and as energetically as ever. But this is immaterial. The principle, my good young people, you are both intelligent enough to see at once, is firmly established. In another year the face of Bindon will have changed. Beldam will scold no more nor maiden mope. You yourself, David—we should have no more of these heavy sighs, if——"

Here Ellinor broke in, rising and holding out the letter.

“Cousin David, I quite forgot—the post brought this for you and I promised to give it.”

“A letter,” said Sir David. He took it from her hand and placed it on the stone parapet. “It is too dark to read it now.” She fancied his voice was troubled, and immediately there grew upon her an inexplicable jealous desire that the letter should be opened in her presence, that she might gain some hint of its contents.

“I will bring out a light,” she said and flew upon her errand, returning presently with a little silver lantern from the observatory. She placed it on the ledge; and from the three glass sides its light threw cross shaped beams, one uselessly into the dark space, one upon the rough stone and the letter, one upon her own bending face, pale and eager, with aureole of disordered hair.

From the darkness Sir David looked at her face first: and it was as if the revealing light had shot into the mists of his own heart.

The passion of love comes to men from so many different paths that to each individual it may be said to come in a new guise. To no one does it come as an invited guest. It may be the chance meeting, the love at first sight—“she never loved at all who loved not at first sight.” But Shakespeare knew better than to advance this as an axiom. ’Tis but the insolent phrase on the lover’s mouth who deems his own passion the only true one, the model for the world. Some, on the other hand, find with amazement that long, long already, in some sweet and familiar shape, love has been with them and they knew it not. They have entertained an angel unawares; and suddenly, it may be on a trivial occasion, the veil has been lifted and the heavenly countenance revealed. Others, like the poor man in the fable, take the treacherous thing to the warmth of their bosom in all trustfulness and only by the sting of it as it uncoils know that they have been struck to the heart. Others, again, as unfortunate, bolt their inhospitable doors upon the wayfarer and perhaps, as they sit by a

lonely hearth, never know that it was love that knocked and went its way, to pass the desolate house no more.

To Sir David Cheveral, whose hot and hopeful youth had been betrayed by life, this sudden apprehension of love in his set manhood came, not in sweetness nor yet in pain, but in a bewildering upheaval of all things ordered—as an earthquake flinging up new heights and baring unknown depths in the staid familiar landscape; as a flash of light—"the light that never was on sea or land," after which nothing ever could look the same again.

It may, in one sense, be true that the man of pleasure is an easier prey to his feelings than he who in asceticism spends his days feeding the spirit at the expense of the flesh; but it is true only because the former man is weak, not because his passion is strong. By so much as the deep river that has been driven to course between its own silent banks is more mighty than the shallow waters that expand themselves in a hundred noisy channels, by so much is the passion of the recluse a thing more irresistible, more terrible to reckon with than the bubble obsession of the self indulgent.

But he who outrages Nature by excess in other direction, by Nature herself is punished. The recluse of Bindon was now to grapple with the avenging strength of his denied manhood. By the leaping of his blood and the tremor of his being, by the joy of his heart, which his instinctive sudden resistance turned into as fierce an anguish, by the heat that rushed to his brow, he knew at last that love was upon him; and he knew that, were he to resist love in obedience to so many unspoken vows, victory would be more bitter than death.

As he looked with a haggard eye at the lovely transfigured face, it was suddenly lost in the shadows again; only a hand flashed forth into the light and this hand held a letter, persisting. He passed his fingers over his eyes and brushed the damp masses of hair from his forehead.

“Will you not read your letter, cousin David?” asked Ellinor.

Mechanically he took the paper held out towards him. She lifted the lantern, that its light might serve him: it trembled a little in her grasp. And now his glance dropped upon the seal. He stared, started, turned the letter over and stared again. Then his warm emotion fell from him.

“You,” said he, “you to bring me this!”

She bent forward, the pale oval of her face coming within the radius of the light again.

“I have no wish to read this letter,” he went on.

There was a deep, a contained emotion in his air. All was fuel to Ellinor’s suddenly risen unreasoning flame of jealousy. That he should take the letter into his solitude, maybe, that she should not know, never know—it was not to be borne!

“Read, read!” she cried, unconsciously imperative by right of her passion.

Their gaze met. His was gloomy and startled, then suddenly became ardent. She saw such a flame leap into his eyes that her own fell before them; then her bold heart sank.

“I would not have opened it. But it shall be as you wish,” he answered. And as David broke the seal, Master Simon’s curious, wrinkled face peered over his shoulder.

“Ha,” said the old man, wonderingly, “The Lochore arms.”

Sir David turned the letter in his hand.

“From your sister?” asked the simpler, with amazed emphasis.

“Once I called her so,” answered the astronomer, with an effort that told of his inner repugnance.

As one wakes from a fevered dream Ellinor awoke from her brief madness. Her father's placid tones, the everyday obvious explanation fell upon her heart like drops of cold water. But the reaction was scarcely one of relief. How was it possible that she, Ellinor Marvel, the woman of many experiences, of the cool brain and the strong heart, should have yielded to this degrading folly, this futile jealousy? What had she done! She shivered as a rapid sequence of thought forced its logic upon her unwilling mind. She had feared that the touch of some woman out of his past should reach David now, at the very moment when a lover's heart was opening to her in his bosom. Behold! she had herself delivered him over to the one woman of all others she had most reason to dread—the woman who, out of her own outrage upon him had acquired the most influence over his life. It seemed to Ellinor as if she herself who had so laboured to call him to the present and lure him with hopes of a brighter future, had now handed him back to the slavery of the past.

The seal cracked under his fingers.

"Ah, no," she cried, now springing forward on the new impulse. "No, no, David, do not read it! Send it back, like the others!"

He flung on her a single glance.

"It is too late," he said, "the seal is broken."

"Ah, me," cried Ellinor. "And we were so happy!"

She remembered Margery's sleek face as it had peered at her in the shadows of the passage: "Will you be good enough to hand this letter yourself to my master?"

Margery had known that from her hand he would take it. Margery had a devil's instinct of the folly of men and women.

# BOOK II — CHAPTER VI THE PERFECT ROSE, DROOPING

CHAPTER VI THE PERFECT ROSE, DROOPING

Such is the fond illusion of my heart, Such pictures would I at that time have made; And seen the soul of truth in every part, A steadfast peace that might not be betrayed.

So once it would have been—'tis so no more: I have submitted to a new control, A power is gone which nothing can restore....
—WORDSWORTH (*Elegiacs*).

Sir David sat down upon the parapet, shifted the lantern and began to read. Ellinor watched him, the tumultuous beating of her heart gradually sinking down to a dull languor. Master Simon was pacing the platform, now conning over some chemical formula to himself, now pausing to gaze upon the stars with a good humoured sneer upon the futility of astronomy in general and the absurdity of Sir David's in particular. A bat came and flapped with noiseless wings round the lantern and was lost again in the darkness of the surrounding deeps. It seemed to Ellinor a heavy space of time, and still David sat with a contracted brow, motionless, staring at the open sheet in his hand. At length he raised his head. His eyes sought, not herself, but the comrade of his long years of solitude.

"Cousin Simon!"

The old man turned in his walk, a fantastic figure in his flapping skirts as he shuffled forward out of the gloom. Evidently he had perceived a note of urgency in Sir David's tone, for he came quickly.

"Yes, lad!"

Ellinor had not yet heard that inflection of solicitude in her father's voice, but she recognised that it belonged also to that past they all dreaded; and for the first time she realised something of the ties that bound these unlikely companions to each other.

"Cousin Simon," said David with stiff lips, "she asks me to receive her here!"

"Who? Maud?—What! the heathen vixen! Don't answer her, don't answer her!"

Sir David looked up. There was the stamp of pain upon his features; and yet, as she told herself, it was not so much pain as the loathing of one forced to contemplate something of utter abhorrence. Both men, she saw, were quite oblivious of her presence: the past was now stronger about them than the present. As Sir David made no answer beyond that dumb look, Master Simon grew yet more vehement.

"Pshaw! man, you're not going to give way now after all these years! The thing's irreparable between you. Why, David, what are you thinking of? How could you bear it? Think for a moment what her presence here would mean!"

Then Sir David spoke:

"It is not," he said, "a question now, of my wishes. So long as I felt justified in considering myself alone, I had no hesitation. But to-night I have to face this: What is my duty?"

"Eh? How, now!" Master Simon stuttered, and could find no word. "Pooh! fudge!" He thrust out a testy hand for the letter.

"Read!" said the master of Bindon, "and then you will understand."

Master Simon seized the document and, stooping to the light began to read the words aloud to himself, according to his custom. Ellinor drew

near and listened. Nothing could have now kept her from yielding to her intense desire to know.

"'Dear Brother,'" read the old gentleman ("Dear Brother!—A dear sister she's proved to you!") "'It is very likely you may never read these lines' (if that isn't a woman all over! ... where am I?) 'according to your heartless custom'—(Ha!" said Master Simon, shooting a swift ironical look at Sir David from under his ever-hanging eyebrows, "since when has Lady Lochore become qualified to pronounce upon heartlessness? Pooh!")

Sir David made no reply. His eyes were fixed on some inward visions. The simpler gave a snort, and resumed his reading:

"'Oh, David, let me see my home once more!' (No, Madam!) 'Let me come to you alone with my child. I am ill——' (Devil doubt her—they're all ill when they don't get their way!) 'I am ill, dying, and sometimes I think that it is because you have not forgiven me. In the name of our father, in the name of our mother,' ('pon my word, she's a clever one!) 'I have a right to demand this! I must see my home before I die.'"

Sir David's compressed lips suddenly worked. He rose and walked across to the other side of the platform, where against the lambent sky, his form once more became a mere silhouette. Master Simon proceeded quietly to finish the letter.

"There's a postscript," he said, and read out: "'You cannot refuse me the hospitality of Bindon for a few weeks, remember that I, too, am a child of the house.'"

"'Remember that I, too, am a child of the house!'"

Ellinor repeated the words drearily to herself. That was the key she herself had found to unlock the door of Sir David's hospitality.

“Upon my soul,” said Master Simon, “I shall never fall foul of the female intellect again!”

He looked at Ellinor, and laughed drily.

“Oh,” she cried, shocked at this inopportune mirth, “she must not come here—we must prevent it!”

“Prevent it!” he cried irritably. “Do so, if you can, my girl. By the Lord Harry!” the forgotten expletive of his jaunty youth leaped oddly forth over his white beard, “she’s done the trick! Touch David upon his honour, his family obligations! Ha! she knows it too. A pest on you!” he went on, his anger rising suddenly, “with your silly female inquisitiveness. ‘Read it, read it!’ quoth she. Without you, Mrs. Marvel, he’d have sent the precious missive back—unopened, like all the others! Ha, that’s an astute one! ‘If you read these lines,’ she writes. Well she knew that if he once did read them she would win her game!”

Beneath an impatient stamp one slipper fell off. Thrusting his foot back into it, he began to hobble in the direction of Sir David, muttering and growling as he went, not unlike his own Belphegor when his cat-dignity had been grievously offended. Disjointed scraps of his remarks reached Ellinor, as she stood, disconsolate and cold at heart, facing the probable results of her impulse:—“A pretty thing ... disturbing the peace of the house ... a mass of selfishness ... a pack of silly women!”

“Well,” said Sir David, turning round as his cousin drew near.

“Why do you say ‘well’?” snapped the simpler. “You know you’ve made up your mind already, and need none of my advice.”

A bitter smile flickered over Sir David’s face.

“Can you say after reading that letter that there is any other course open to me?”

“Stuff and nonsense! A half-dozen excellent courses. You can leave the letter unanswered. You can write to the lady that these home affections come a little late in the day. You can write, if you like, and forgive her by post. You can take coach to London and forgive her there, and.... But, in Heaven’s name, stem the stream of petticoats from invading our peace here!”

“What,” exclaimed the younger man, a blackness as of thunder gathering on his brow. “Do you, do you, cousin Simon, bid me enter Lochore’s house!”

Disconcerted, Master Simon lost his ill humour, though to conceal the fact he still tried to bluster.

“Pooh! You’re not of this century. You’re mediæval, quixotic! David, man, high feelings are not worn nowadays. They have been put by, with knighthood’s armour. Don’t forgive her then, lad. I am sure I see no reason why you should.”

“Forgiveness!” echoed Sir David.

Ellinor had crept close to them once more. That bitter ring in David’s voice smote her heart.

“Forgiveness!” he repeated. “Does he who remembers ever forgive? My sister is ill and craves to return to her old home. Well, I recognise her right to its hospitality and also to my courtesy as the dispenser of it. More I cannot give her.”

“She’ll not ask for more!” interrupted the unconvinced simpler. “Eh, eh! It is my fault, David: I might have known how it would be. I brought in the first petticoat and there the mischief began.”

“Oh, father!”

The tears sprang to Ellinor's eyes. Sir David turned round and seemed to become again aware of her presence.

"No, no," he said, "that is ungrateful." He took her hand. "She brought us sunshine," he said.

But she missed from his pressure the tremulous touch of passion; she missed from his eyes that flame she had shrunk from and that now her heart would always hunger for. Pure kindness, mild sadness—what could her enkindled soul make now of such gifts as these? With an inarticulate sound she drew her fingers from his clasp; and, turning, fled downstairs again and back to her room.

A taper was burning on her writing table, and in its small meek circle of light a bowl of monthly roses displayed their innocent pink beauty. The latticed casement was thrown open. In the square of sky a single silver star pointed the illimitable distance. From the Herb-Garden below rose gushes of aromatic airs, as, from some secret cloister by night the voices of the dedicated rise and fall. Vaguely, in her seething misery, she seemed to recognise the special essence of the new plant giving to the cool night the sweetness accumulated during the long, hot hours of the day.

She sat down on the narrow bed, folded her hands on her lap and stared dully forth at the square of sky and the single star. Presently, almost without her own consciousness, her bosom began to heave with long sighs and tears to course down her cheeks. Where was now the strength, the indifference to passing events which she boasted her long battle with life had given her? Gone, gone at the first touch of passion! Throughout a sordid marriage she had remained virgin of heart, she had kept the virgin's peace—and now?

Alternations of pride and despair broke over her like waves, salt and bitter as her own tears. How happy they had been! And the unknown

fiend, jealousy, had urged her to break the still current of that sweet, restful half-unwitting happiness of their life all three together—a current flowing, she had told herself with conviction, to a full tide of unimaginable bliss.

My God, how he had looked at her only that night! And it was in that pearl of moments that she had thrust his past back upon him and bade him, with her precious, new-found power, read the letter that should never have been opened. The perfect rose had been within her grasp. It was her own hand that had flung it in the dust.

Master Simon, still shaking his head and muttering disapproval, went slowly back to his laboratory.

“The cunning jade!” he was grumbling, “she’s no more ill than I am. Or if she be, a pretty business we shall have with her—a fine lady with vapours, and megrims, and tantrums! I’ve not forgotten the ways of them...!”

But here an illuminating idea flashed upon his brain. He stopped at the corner of a passage, cocking his head like an old grey jackdaw. “Eh, but a fine lady in her tantrums.... What a test for the virtues of my paragon herb!”

All very well to rejoice at its efficacy upon the homely rustic. Master Simon had experimented upon the homely rustic too many years not to have developed a fine contempt for his vile corpus; he was too true an enthusiast not to long for something like a proper nervous system upon which to work.

An air of returning good humour now settled upon his face; and by the time he was seated at his table, he had begun to wish his unwelcome cousin really a prey to the most advanced melancholia, and was conning over what phrases he could remember of her letter—delighted when they seemed to point to that conclusion.

“And even if she be not pining away for sorrow, as she would like poor David to believe, if I remember the lady aright, she has as disordered a temper of her own as John Cantrip himself.”

# BOOK II — CHAPTER VII NODS AND WREATHÉD SMILES

## CHAPTER VII NODS AND WREATHÉD SMILES

... Half light, half shade, She stood, a sight to make an old man young.
—TENNYSON (*Gardener's Daughter*).

Within Bindon house the next ten days were as uneventful as those that had preceded this night of emotional trouble; days similar in routine, in outward tranquillity. But how unlike in colour, in atmosphere! It was as if thunder-clouds had chased all the summer peace; as if brooding skies had taken the place of radiance and laughing blue; as if close mists enshrouded the earth, robbing the woods of living light and shade, dulling the tints of flower and turf, contracting the horizon. The former days had been days of many-hued hope; these now were days of drab suspense. And ever and anon, in the listening stillness, there came upon Ellinor's inner senses, as from behind hiding hills, the far-off mutter of a gathering storm.

But in the outer world the summer still kept its glory, the sky its undisturbed azure, the flowers their jewel hues. Never had Bindon looked fairer, more nobly itself. Preparations went on apace for the reception of the visitor. Ellinor personally saw to every detail—she piqued herself that no one could reproach her with not carrying out to the finest line of conscientiousness her duties as housekeeper of Sir David's home. A little paler, a little colder, more silently and with just a note of sternness, she moved about her tasks. Nothing was made easy for her: the household, scenting a possible change, became more openly inclined to mutiny.

Master Simon, also, seemed to become more exacting in his demands upon her time. Sir David, on the other hand, had withdrawn almost as

completely as had been his wont before her arrival. And her woman's pride and tact alike kept her from those raids upon his tower privacy, which but a little time ago had caused him so much pleasure, it seemed, and herself such infinite sweetness.

It was hard, too, to have to meet Margery's paroxysm of astonishment; Margery's ostentatious outburst of joy at the thought of "her dear young lady coming back to her rightful place at last"; Margery's insolence of triumph as regarded "the interloper," astutely conveyed in such humble garments that to notice it would have been but a crowning humiliation.

"Eh, to think, ma'am," the ex-housekeeper would say in her innocent voice, "that it should have been that very letter I handed you myself, never dreaming, that's brought this blessed reconciliation about! It do seem like the finger of the Lord. Ah, ma'am, but you must be glad in your heart, to feel yourself the instrument of peace. Who knows, if the master would have taken it from any hand but yours, he that used to return them as regular and just as fast as they came!"

And then came parson and Madam Tutterville: he, as beseemed the God-chosen and state-appointed minister of the gospel of charity, most duly (and unconvincingly) approving the proposed reconciliation; and, as man of the world, most humanly and convincingly dubious of its results: she, openly bewailing, with all her store of texts and feminine logic, so inconvenient a hitch in her secret plans.

Ellinor had to receive them both. For the lower door of Sir David's turret stairs was bolted, and Master Simon on his side had stoutly refused any manner of interview with anyone so sturdily healthy as the rector, or so disdainful of his remedies as the rector's lady.

"Under every law," said Doctor Tutterville, "the Jewish, the Pagan, the Philosophic and the Christian in its many variations, it has been enjoined

upon our human weakness that it is advisable to forgive: *Æquum est peccatis veniam poscentem reddere rursus*.

So the rector, acknowledging his share of frailty—a share so pleasant to himself and so inoffensive to others that it was no wonder he showed little desire to repudiate it.

“One may forgive,” said Madam Tutterville sententiously. “Heaven knows I should be the last to deny that!”—this with the air of making a valuable concession to the decrees of Providence—“But there is another law: that chastisement shall follow misdoing. Was not David punished through Jonathan’s hair?”

The parson’s waistcoat rippled over his gentle laughter. He was seated in one of the deep-winged library armchairs, and while he spoke his eyes roamed with ever renewed satisfaction over the appointments of the room—the silver bowl of roses, fresh filled, the artistic neatness of writing table, the high polish of oak and gilt leather. His fine appreciation for the fitness of things was tickled; his glance finally rested with complacency upon the figure of the young woman herself—the capable young woman who had wrought so many pleasing changes. And as he looked he smiled: Ellinor was the culminating point of agreeable contemplation amid exceedingly agreeable surroundings.

She toned in so well with the scene! The sober golds and russets of the walls repeated their highest note in her burnished hair. Her outline, as she sat, exactly corresponded to the rector’s theory of what the female line of beauty should be. He liked the close, fine texture of her skin and the hues upon her cheeks, which fluctuated from geranium-white to glorious rose. The proud curl of her lip appealed to him; so did the sudden dimple. He liked the direct gaze of her honest blue eyes, and he was not unaware of the thickness and length of eyelashes that seemed to have little points of fire on their tips.

That scholarly gentleman's admiration was of so lofty, so philosophic a nature, that even his Sophia could have found no fault with it. But as he yielded himself to it, the conviction was ever more strongly borne in upon him that his wife, in her impetuosity, had reached to a juster conclusion concerning Ellinor than he in his own ripe wisdom. He had treated her repeated remark that "Here was just the wife for David, here the proper mistress of Bindon," with his usual good-natured contempt. But to-day he saw Ellinor with new eyes. Yes, this was a gem worthy of Bindon setting. This would be a noble wife for any man; an ideal one for David—for fastidious David, to whom the old epicure felt especially drawn, although he recognised that one may make of fastidiousness a fine art and not push the cult to the point of David's eccentricity.

Here, then, was a woman fair enough to bring the Star-Dreamer, the soaring idealist back to earth; wholesomely human enough to keep him there in sanity and content, once Love had clipped his wing.

Meanwhile Madam Tutterville was bringing a long dissertation to an end. In it, by the help of the scriptures, old and new, she had proved that while it was indubitably David's duty to forgive his sister up to a certain point, it was likewise indubitably incumbent upon him to continue to keep her in wholesome remembrance of her offences by excluding her from Bindon, until——. Here the lady became exceedingly mysterious and addressed herself with nods and becks solely to her husband, ignoring Ellinor's presence, much after the fashion of nurses over the heads of their charges.

"At least until that happy consummation of affairs, Horatio, which you and I have so much discussed."

"My dear Ellinor," she pursued, turning blandly to her niece, who with a suddenly scarlet face was trying in vain to look as if she had not understood, "be guided by my advice, by my advice. It is extremely desirable, I might say imperative, that things should remain at present at

Bindon House in what your good uncle would term the state of quo, a Greek word, my dear, signifying that it is best to leave well alone."

"What is it you would have me do?"

"Well, my dear, seeing that everything has been going on so nicely these months, and that Bindon has become no longer like a family lunatic asylum, but quite a respectable, clean house, and that Nutmeg thing reduced to proper order, and David almost human, coming down to meals just as if he were in his right mind (though I've given up your father, my dear), I'm afraid that in his case that clear cohesion of intellect which is so necessary (is it not, Horatio?) is irrevocably affected."

She tapped her forehead and shook her head, murmured something about the instance of John Cantrip, hesitated for a moment, as if on the point of gliding off in another direction, but saved herself with a heroic jerk.

"I would be glad," she went on, "to have had speech of David myself; but since you tell me that is impossible, Ellinor, I must be content with laying my injunctions upon you. And indeed (is it not so, Horatio?) you are perhaps the most fitted for this delicate task. The voice of the turtle, my dear, is more likely to reach his heart than the dictates of wisdom."

"The voice of the turtle, aunt?"

"Yes, my dear," said Madam Tutterville, putting her head on one side with a languishing air. "In the beautiful imagery of Solomon the turtle—the bird, my love, not the shell-fish—is always brought forward as the emblem of female devotion."

"I don't see how that can refer to me!"

Ellinor sprang to her feet as she spoke: the rector's gurgle of amusement was the last straw to her patience. Angry humiliation dyed her face, her blue eyes shot flames.

“Oh, don’t explain, I can’t bear it! But please, dear aunt, please, don’t call me a turtle again! It’s the last thing I am, or want to be!”

She broke, in spite of herself, into laughter; laughter with a lump in her throat.

Parson Tutterville had been highly entertained. Mrs. Marvel was quite as agreeable to watch in wrath as in repose. But he was a man of feeling.

“I think, Sophia,” he said, in the tone she never resisted, “we will pursue the subject no further. However we may regret any interruption to the present satisfactory state of affairs, regret for David a visit that is likely to prove distressing, we cannot but agree with Mrs. Marvel that it is not her place to interfere.”

He rose as he spoke. The morning visit was at an end.

Even an encounter with Mrs. Nutmeg could not have left Ellinor in a more irritated condition.

“What do they all think of me?” she asked herself, and pride forbade her to shed a single one of the hot tears that rose to her lids.

“What have I done?” was the question that next forced itself upon a mind that was singularly truthful. She had placed herself indeed in a position open to comment and misinterpretation. And then and there she had given herself up so wholly, so unrestrainedly to love that she had actually come to measure the strength of her attraction for her unconsenting lover against the strength, or the weakness, of his will.

As she faced the thought, a sense of shame overcame her. Had she not known how helpless both her father and David would be without her, especially at this juncture, she would have been sorely tempted to be gone as she had come. It was not in her nature to contemplate anything ungenerous, even for the gratification of that strongest of passions in woman, self respect. But in her present mood, even the rector’s

well-meant, kindly words recurred to sting—“It was not her place to interfere!” Well, she would keep her place, as David’s servant, and not presume again beyond her duty!

Yes, and she would take that other place, too—the woman’s place, the queen’s place, not to be won without being wooed. If David wanted her now he must seek her!

# BOOK II — CHAPTER VIII A GREY GOWN AND RED ROSES

CHAPTER VIII A GREY GOWN AND RED ROSES

And then we met in wrath and wrong. We met, but only meant to part. Full cold my greeting was and dry; She faintly smiled ... —TENNYSON (*The Letters*).

Fain would Ellinor have avoided being present at the reception of the guests. But Sir David willed it otherwise.

Bearing an armful of roses, she met him on the morning of the arrival at the foot of the great stairs. She had scarcely seen him since the night on the tower; and hurt to her heart's core, as only a woman can be, by his seeming avoidance of her, she faced him with a front as cold, a manner as courteously reserved as his own. For it was a different David from any she had hitherto known that now emerged from many days' seclusion and soul struggle.

"What, 'tis you, cousin Ellinor!" He took her hand and ceremoniously kissed it.

There was a tone of artificiality about his words. This perfunctory touch of his lips on her hand, this formal bow, all these things belonged to that past of the lord of Bindon, when society knew and petted him; and in that past Ellinor felt with fresh acuteness that she had no part. She drew her hand away.

"I hope," she said, "the arrangements may be to your liking."

He glanced at her as if puzzled; then his eye travelled over her figure—an exquisite model of neatness she always was, but in this, her working

gown, no more fashionably clad than dairy Moll or Sue. He took up a fold of her sleeve between his first and second finger.

“My sister used to be a very fine lady,” said he gently.

“And I am none,” cried Ellinor, flushing. Then, gathering the roses into her arms and moving away: “But it matters the less,” she added over her shoulder, “as Lady Lochore and I are not likely to come much across each other.”

But David, this new David, a painful enigma to her, touched her detainingly on the shoulder; and in his touch was authority.

“On the contrary,” said he, “I beg you will see much of my sister. Dispenser as you are of my hospitality, you must needs see much of her.”

The flush had faded. Proud and pale she looked at him long, but his face was as a sealed page to her. What was this turn of fortune’s wheel bringing, glory or abasement?

“I must keep my place,” insisted Ellinor.

“That will be your place,” he answered. “Pray be ready to receive my guests with me.”

She raised her eyes, startled, indeterminate.

“I and my frocks are poor company for great ladies,” she said with a scornful dimple.

At that he smiled as one smiles upon a child.

“You have a certain grey gown,” he said. And, after a little pause, he added: “Some of those roses.”

The fragrance of them had come over to him as they moved with her breath. Once more she hesitated for a second, then dropping her eyelids, she said, with mock humility:

“It shall be as you order,” and went up the stairs with head erect and steady step, feeling that his gaze was following her.

She could hardly have explained to herself why this attitude of David’s, this sudden proof of his strength in forcing himself to become like other people, should cause her so much resentment and so much pain. But she felt that this man of the world was infinitely far removed from the absent star-gazer, from the neglected recluse who had so needed her ministrations. The *rôles* seemed reversed. It was no longer she who was the protector, the power directing events, no longer she who ruled by right of wisdom and sweet common sense. David had become independent of her. Hardest thing of all, to be no longer indispensable to him! And yet even in this unexpected cup of bitterness there was a redeeming sweet: he had remembered her grey gown, he had noticed that the roses became her.

My Lady Lochore arrived towards that falling hour of the day when the shadows are growing long and soft, when the slanting light is amber: it might be called the coloured hour, for the sun begins to veil its splendour, so that eyes, undazzled, may rejoice. The swallows were dipping across the sward of golden-emerald and Bindon stood proudly golden-grey in the light, silver-grey in the shadows and against the blue.

This daughter of the house came back to it with a fine clatter of horses and a blasting of post horns; followed by a retinue of valets and maids; acclaimed along the village street by shouting children, while aged gaffers and gammers bobbed on their cottage door-steps and showered interested blessings. (Margery had prepared that ground in good time.) She was welcomed in stately fashion by the chief servants and the master of the house himself on the threshold of her old home.

Ellinor, half hidden behind the statue of Diana and its spreading green, watched the scene, waiting for her own moment.

How different had been, she thought to herself, the return of poor Ellinor Marvel, that other daughter of Bindon, upon the cold September night, solitary, travel-worn, penniless, knocking in vain at the door her forefathers had built, creeping round back ways like a beggar, with the bats circling by her in the darkness and the watchdog growling at her from his kennel; unbidden, entering her old house, unwelcomed.—Unwelcomed? Was cousin Maud welcomed?

In her rustling thin silk spencer and her fluttering muslin, with hectic, handsome face, looking anxiously out from under the wide befeathered bonnet, Lady Lochore advanced her thin sandalled foot on the step of the coach and rested her hand upon David's extended arm.

This was their meeting after years of estrangement! For a second she wavered, made a movement as if she would fling herself into her brother's arms; the ribbons on her bosom fluttered—was it with a heaving sob? She glanced up at David's severe countenance and suddenly stiffened herself. He bent and brushed the gloved wrist with his lips.

"Sister, Bindon greets you!"

She tossed her head, and her plumes shook. It seemed to the watching Ellinor as if she would have twitched her hand from his fingers; but he led her on. And the two last Cheverals walked up the steps together.

The servants, Margery at their head, breathed respectful whispers of welcome. The lady nodded haughtily and vaguely. She stood in the hall and David dropped her hand. His eye was cold, there was a faint sneer on his lips.

Welcomed? Ah, no! Ellinor would not have exchanged her dark night of home-coming for her cousin's golden ceremonious day. Ellinor had cared little at heart—absorbed in her young freedom and her new confidence in life—how she should be received, but the lord of Bindon had looked into

her eyes and bade her “welcome,” and laid his lips, lips that could not lie, upon hers.

When Ellinor emerged from behind her foliage screen, Lady Lochore was struggling in Madam Tutterville’s stout embrace. Sir David had summoned all his family upon the scene; and—yes, actually it was her father (in a wonderful blue anachronism of a coat) who was talking so eagerly to the smiling rector that he seemed quite oblivious of the purpose of his own presence.

Aunt Sophia had prepared a fitting address for one whom she had been long wont to regard (however regretfully) as Jezebel. But, as usual, her sternness had melted under the impulse of her warm heart.

“My goodness, child,” she exclaimed, “you look ill indeed!” and folded her arms about her wasted figure.

Lady Lochore disengaged herself unceremoniously.

“Is that you, Aunt Sophy? Lord, you have grown stout! Ill? Of course I am! And your jolting roads are not likely to mend matters. Has the second coach come up? Where’s Josephine? Where is my boy?”

“The second coach is just rounding the avenue corner,” said Margery at her elbow, “please my lady.”

Lady Lochore wheeled round. Her movements were all restless and impatient, like those of a creature fevered. “Goodness, woman, how you made me jump!”

She put up her long handled eyeglasses and fixed the simpler and the parson with a momentary interest. Her white teeth shone in a smile soon gone. Hardly would she answer the rector’s elegantly turned compliment; but she vouchsafed a more flattering attention to Master Simon, as he bowed with an antiquated, severe courtesy that was quite his own.

“That’s cousin Simon! I remember him and all his little watch-glasses, tubes, and things. I hope you’ve got the little watch-glasses still, cousin. I used to like you. You made Bindon rather interesting, I remember.” She yawned, as if to the recollection of past dulness; an open unchecked yawn, such as your fine lady alone can comfortably achieve in company. “I hope you’ll make some little nostrum for me, something nice smelling to dab on a freckle, or kill a wrinkle with—I think I have a wrinkle coming under my left eye.”

She suddenly arrested the dropping impudent langour of her speech, clenched a fine gloved hand over the stick of her eyeglass and stared fixedly: Ellinor had come out and stood in a shaft of light, as she had an unconscious trick of doing, seeking the warmth instinctively as any frank young animal might.

A radiant thing she looked, grey-clad, with the gorgeous crimson of a summer rose at her belt, her crisp rebellious hair on fire, her chin and neck gold outlined.

“Who is this?” said Lady Lochore, in a new voice, as sharp as a needle. It was David who answered:

“Our cousin, Ellinor Marvel!”

“How do you do,” said Ellinor composedly.

There was no attempt on either side at even a hand touch. Lady Lochore nodded.

“Ellinor is my good providence here,” continued Sir David. “I should not have ventured to receive you in this bachelor establishment had it not been for her presence. But now everything, I am confident, will be as it should be during the month that you honour this house with your presence.” He enunciated each word with determined deliberateness; it was like the pronouncing of a sentence. Once again Ellinor felt the

implacable passion of the man under the set, controlled manner. “If you should desire anything, pray address yourself to cousin Ellinor,” he added.

Lady Lochore put down her eyeglasses and looked for a second with natural angry eyes from one to the other. She bit her lip and it seemed as if beneath the rouge her cheek turned ghastly.

She had come prepared to fight and prepared to hate. Yet this sudden rage springing up within her was not due to reason but to instinct. It was the ferocious antipathy of the fading woman for the fresh beauty; of the woman who has failed in love for her who seems born to command love as she goes. Lady Lochore could not look upon her cousin’s fairness without that inner revulsion of anger which not only works havoc with the mind but distils acrid poison into the blood.

The clatter of the second coach was heard without.

“Give me the child, give me the boy!” cried Lady Lochore. She made a rush, with fluttering silks, to the doors. “No one shall show my boy to his uncle but myself!”

“Mamma’s own!”

Could that be Lady Lochore’s voice? She came staggering back upon them, clasping a lusty, kicking child in her frail arms; the whole countenance of the woman was changed—“A heartless, callow creature,” so Madam Tutterville had called her, and so Ellinor had learned to regard her. But even the legendary monster has its vulnerable spot: there could be no mistaking Maud Lochore’s passionate maternity. Ellinor drew a step nearer, attracted in spite of herself; she could almost have wished to see David’s face unbend. But its previous severity only gave way to something like mockery, as he looked at mother and child.

“David!” cried his sister, “David, this is my boy!” There was a wild appeal in her voice, almost breaking upon tears. “Edmund I have called him, after our father, David. Edmund, my treasure, speak to your uncle!”

“I will, if you put me down!” The three-year-old boy struggled to free himself from his mother’s embrace. His velvet cap fell off and a cherub face under deep red curls was revealed. Ellinor remembered how the Master of Lochore’s red head had flashed through these very halls in the old days, and she hardly dared glance at David.

“I’ll stand down on my own legs, please!” said the child. “And now I’ll speak.”

He shook out his ruffled petticoat and looked up, and his great, velvet brown eyes wandered from face to face. The genial ruddiness, the benevolent smile of the good, childless parson appealed to him first.

“Good morning, mine uncle, I hope you’ll learn to love——”

Lady Lochore plunged upon him.

“No, Edmund, no! not there! See boy, this is your uncle.”

She clutched at David’s sleeve, while Madam Tutterville’s tears of easy emotion ran into her melting smile; and quite unscriptural exclamations, such as “duck,” and “little pet,” and “lambkin” fell from her delighted lips.

“Speak to uncle David, darling! David, won’t you say a word to my child?”

Ellinor could almost have echoed the wail—it cut into her womanly heart to see David repel the little one. But he bent and looked down searchingly into the little face. At that moment the child, again struggling against the maternal control, drew his baby brows together and set his baby features into a scowl of temper. Sir David looked; and in the defiant

eyes, in the little set mouth, in the very frown, saw the image of his traitor friend. His own brows gathered into as black a knot as if he had been confronting Lochore himself. He drew himself up and folded his arms:

“Cease prompting the child, Maud,” said he, “let his lips speak truth, at least as long as they may!”

He turned and left them. The little Master of Lochore was ill-accustomed to meet an angry eye or to hear a disapproving voice. And, as his mother rose to her feet, shooting fury through her wet eyes upon the discomfited circle, he, too, glanced round for comfort and rapidly making his choice, flung himself upon Ellinor and hid his face in her skirts, screaming.

The clinging hands, the hot, tear-stained cheeks, the baby lips, opened yet responsive to her kisses—Ellinor never forgot the touch of these things. Almost it was, when Lady Lochore wrenched him from her arms, as if something of her own had been plucked from her.

“I want the pretty lady, I will have the pretty lady!” roared the heir, as Josephine, the nurse, and Margery carried him between them to his nursery.

As Lady Lochore, following in their wake, swept by Ellinor, she gathered her draperies and shot a single phrase from between her teeth. It was so low, however, that Ellinor only caught one word. The blood leaped to her brow as under the flick of a lash. But even alone, in her bed at night, she would not, could not admit to herself that it had had the hideous significance which the look, the gesture seemed to throw into it.

“So it is war!” said Lady Lochore, standing in the middle of her gorgeous room, the flame of anger devouring her tears. “Well, so much the better!”

She stood before the mirror, her chin sunk on her breast, biting at the laces of her kerchief, while her great eyes stared unseeingly at the

reflection of her own sullen, wasted beauty. War! On the whole it suited her better than a hypocritical peace. Hers was not a nature that could long wear a mask. She was one who could better fight for what she loved than fawn. And now she had got her foot into her old home at last; aye, and her boy's! After so many years of struggle and failure it was a triumph that must augur well for the future.

Never had she realised so fully how prosperous, how noble an estate was Bindon, how altogether desirable; how different from the barren acres of Roy and the savage discomfort of its neglected castle. To this plenty, this refinement, this richness, these traditions, her splendid boy was heir by right of blood. And she would have him remain so! She laughed aloud, suddenly, scornfully, and tossed her head with a ghost of the wild grace that had made Maud Cheveral the toast of a London season; a grace that still drew in the wake of the capricious, fading Lady Lochore a score of idle admirers. It would be odd indeed if the sly country widow, pink and white as she was, should be a match for her, now that they could meet on level ground.

There came a knock at the door.

"If you please, my lady," said Margery, "humbly asking your pardon for intruding, I hope your ladyship remembers me. I'm one of the old servants, and glad to welcome your ladyship back again to your rightful place. And the little heir, as we call him, God bless him for a beauty——"

"Come in, woman," cried Lady Lochore, "come in and shut the door!"

# BOOK II — CHAPTER IX A RIDER INTO BATH

CHAPTER IX A RIDER INTO BATH

It is not quiet, is not ease, But something deeper far than these: The separation that is here is of the grave. —WORDSWORTH (*Elegiac Poems*).

If a woman, being in love, gain thereby a certain intuition into the character of the man she loves, the thousand contradictory emotions of that unrestful state, its despairs, angers, jealousies, its unreasonable susceptibilities, all combine to obscure her judgment; so that, at the same time she knows him better than anyone else can, and yet can be harsher, more unjust to him than the rest of the world.

Thus Ellinor understood exactly what was now causing the metamorphosis of David. She alone guessed the struggle of his week's seclusion, from which he had emerged armoured, as it were, to face the slings and arrows of the new turn of fate. She alone knew the inward shrinking, the sick distaste which were covered by this polished breast-plate of sarcastic reserve; knew that this deadly courtesy was the only weapon to his hand, and that he would not lay it aside for a second in the enemy's presence. At that moment when she had seen him read in the child's face the image of its father, she had read in his own eyes the irrevocable truth of those slow words of his under the night sky: "He who remembers never forgives."

She felt, too, that his very regard for her made it incumbent on him to treat her now as ceremoniously as his other guest; that to have openly singled her out for notice, or privately to have indulged himself with her company, would have been alike tactless and ungenerous. But in spite of

all reason could tell her, she felt hurt, she was chilled, she gave him back coldness for coldness and mocking formality for his grave courtesy.

Now and again his eyes would rest upon her, questioning. But shut out from his night watch on the tower; shut out by day from their former intimacy by his every speech and gesture, Ellinor's feminine sensibility always overcame her clear head and her generous heart.

A few days dragged by thus; slow, stiff, intolerable days. At last Lady Lochore threw off the mask insolently. Towards the end of their late breakfast, after an hour of yawns and sighs and pettish tossing of the good things upon her plate, she suddenly requested of her brother, in tones that made of the request a command, permission to invite some guests.

"Bindon shrieks for company," said she, "and, thanks as I understand, to Mrs. Marvel, it is fairly fit to receive company. And, I know you like frankness, brother, I will admit I am used to some company."

She flung a fleering look from Ellinor's erect head to the alchemist's bent, rounded crown. (Master Simon was deeply interested in Lady Lochore's case, and as he entertained certain experimental schemes in his own mind, sought her company at every opportunity: hence his unwonted appearance at meals.) Sir David slowly turned an eye of ironic inquiry upon his sister; but his lips were too polite to criticise.

"Anything that can add to your entertainment during your short stay here," said he, "must, of course, commend itself to us."

Had Ellinor been less straitened by her own passionate pride, she might have stooped to pick up solace from that little plural word.

"Then I shall write," said Lady Lochore, with her usual toss of the head. "If you'll kindly send a rider into Bath—there are a few of my friends yet

there, I learn by my morning's *courier*—I'll have the letters ready for the mail."

Sir David went on slowly peeling a peach. For a while he seemed absorbed in the delicate task. Then, laying down the fruit, but without looking up from his plate, he said:

"I presume, before you write those letters that you intend to submit the names of my prospective guests to me."

Lady Lochore flushed. She knew to what he referred; knew that there was one guest to which the doors of Bindon would never be opened in its present master's lifetime. She was angry with herself for having made the blunder of allowing him to imagine for a moment that she was plotting so absurd a move. She hesitated, and then, with characteristic cynicism:

"What!" she cried, "do you think I want that devil here? No more than you do yourself."

"Hey, hey!" cried Master Simon, startled from some abstruse cogitation.

Still Sir David looked rigidly down at his plate.

"God knows," pursued the reckless woman, "it's little enough I see of him now—but that is already too much!"

She paused, and yet there was no answer. Then with her scornful laugh:

"There's old Mrs. Geary, the Honourable Caroline—you remember her, David?—the Dishonourable Caroline, as they call her in the Assembly Rooms; whether she cheats or not is no business of mine, but she is the only woman I care to play piquet with. There's Colonel Harcourt and Luke Herrick—they make up the four, and I don't think you'll find anything wrong with their pedigree. Herrick's too young for you to know. Priscilla Geary is in love with him—he's a *parti*, as rich as he is handsome—and I'll want a bait to lure the old lady from the green cloth

at Bath. And if we have Herrick we must have Tom Villars too, else Herrick will have no one to jest at. And besides, the creature is useful to me."

Sir David interrupted her with a sudden movement. He pushed his chair away from the table and, looking up from the untouched fruit, fixed for a second a glance of such weary contempt upon his sister that even her bold eyes fell.

"A Jew, a libertine, an admitted cheat—oh yes, I remember Mr. Villars, Colonel Harcourt, and Mrs. Geary. The younger generation, of whose acquaintance I have not yet the honour, will no doubt prove worthy of such elders!" He paused again, to continue in his uninflected voice: "Since these are the sort of guests you most wish to see at Bindon, you have my permission to invite them."

He rose as he spoke, giving the signal for the breaking up of the uncomfortable circle. As Lady Lochore whisked past Master Simon, in his antiquated blue garment, she paused. She had a sort of liking for the old man, odd enough when contrasted with the deadly enmity she had vowed his daughter.

"Could you not discover," she whispered, "a leaf or a berry that might take some effect upon the disease of priggishness? That new plant of yours. Did you not say ... didn't you call it the Star-of-Comfort? I am sure it would be a comfort."

The effect of the whisper told upon a chest that occasionally found the ordinary drawing of breath too much for it. She broke off to cough, and coughed till her frail form seemed like to be riven. Master Simon watched her gravely.

"I could give you something for that cough, child," said he. Then his withered cheek began to kindle, "Something to soothe the cough first, and then, perhaps, I—I—that restless temperament of yours, that

dissatisfied and capricious disposition—the Star-of-Comfort, indeed——”

She shook her hand in his face.

“Not I,” she gasped. “No more quackery for me! Lord, I’m as tough as a worm, Simon.” She laughed and coughed and struggled for breath. “I believe if you were to cut me up into little bits, I’d wriggle together again, but I’ll not answer for poison.”

She flung him a malicious look and flaunted forth, ostentatiously oblivious of Ellinor—her habitual practise when not openly insulting.

When Sir David and Master Simon were alone together the old man went solemnly up to his cousin, and laid his hand upon his breast.

“David,” said he, “that sister of yours won’t live another year unless she gives up the adverse climate of Scotland, the impure air of the town and the racket of fashionable life.”

“Tell her so, then,” said Sir David.

Master Simon drew back and blinkingly surveyed the set face with an expression of doubt, surprise and unwilling respect.

“The woman’s ill,” he ventured at last.

“Shall I bid her rest? Shall I cancel those letters of invitation?” asked Sir David ironically.

THE STAR DREAMER

# BOOK III

Come down ... from yonder mountain heights. And come, for Love is of the valley, come, For Love is of the valley, come thou down!
TENNYSON (*The Princess.*)

# BOOK III — CHAPTER I THE LITTLE MASTER OF BINDON

## CHAPTER I THE LITTLE MASTER OF BINDON

She played about with slight and sprightly talk, And vivid smiles, and faintly venom'd points Of slander, glancing here and grazing there. —TENNYSON (*Merlin and Vivien*).

In the terraced gardens, under the spreading shadows of the cedar trees, was gathered a motley group. Beyond that patch of shade the sun blazed down on stone steps and balusters, on green turf and scarlet geranium, with a fervour the eye could scarce endure. The air was full of hot scents. On a day such as this, Bindon of old was wont to seem asleep: lulled by the rhythmic, rocking dream-note of the wild pigeons, deep in its encircling woods. On a day such as this, the wise rooks would put off conclave and it would be but some irrepressible younger member of the ancient community that would take a wild flight away from leafy shade and, wheeling over the tree tops, drop between the blue and the green a drowsy caw. But things were changed this July at Bindon: these very rooks held noisy counsel in mid air and discussed what flock of strange bright birds it was that had alighted in their quiet corner of the world, to startle its greens and greys, to out-flaunt its flower-beds with outlandish parrot plumage, to break the humming summer silence with unknown clamours.

"The Deyvil take my soul!" said Thomas Villars reflectively.

He was sitting on the grass at Lady Lochore's feet; his long legs in the last cut of trousers strapped over positively the latest boots. The slimness of his waist, the juvenility of his manner, the black curls that hung luxuriantly over his clean-shaven face, all this conspired to give Mr.

Villars quite an illusive air of youth, even from a very short distance. Only a close examination revealed the lines on the rouged cheek and the wrinkled fall of chin that the highest and finest stock could not quite conceal. The latest pedigree gave the year of his birth as some lost fifty years ago—it also described the lady who had presided at that event as belonging to the illustrious Castillian house of Lara. But ill-natured friends persisted, averred that this lady had belonged to no more foreign regions than the Minories, and thus they accounted for Tom's black ringlets, for his bold arch of nose, for his slightly thick consonants and his unconquerable fondness for personal jewellery.

Mr. Villars was, however, almost universally accepted by society: his knowledge of the share market was only second to his astounding acquaintance with everyone's exact financial situation.

"Deyvil take my soul!" he insisted. Tom Villars was fond of an oath as of a fine genteel habit.

"I defy even the Devil to do that," said Lady Lochore, stopping the languidly pettish flap of her fan to shoot an angry look at him over its edge.

"Why so, fairest Queen of the Roses?"

"Tom Villars sold his soul to the Devil long ago," put in Colonel Harcourt. "It is no longer an asset."

Frankly fifty, with a handsome ruddy face under a sweep of grey hair that almost gave the impression of the forgotten becomingness of the powdered peruke, Colonel Harcourt, of the Grenadiers, erect, broad-chested, pleasantly swaggering, good humoured and yet haughty, proclaimed the guardsman to the first glance, even in his easy country garb.

“Sold his soul to the Devil?” echoed Luke Herrick, lifting his handsome young face from the daisies he was piling in pretty Priscilla Geary’s pink silk lap. “Sold his soul, did he? Uncommon bargain for Beelzebub and Co.! I thought the firm did better business.”

“You are quite wrong,” said Lady Lochore, looking down with disfavour upon the countenance of her victim, who feigned excessive enjoyment of the ambient wit and humour. “The Devil cannot take Tom Villars’ soul, nor could Tom Villars sell it to the Devil, for the very good reason that Tom Villars never had a soul to be disposed of.”

A shout of laughter went round the glowing idle group.

“Cruel, cruel, lady mine!” murmured the oriental Villars, striving to throw a fire of pleading devotion into his close-set shallow eyes as he looked up at Lady Lochore and at the same time to turn a dignified deaf ear upon his less important tormentors. “In how have I offended that you thus make a pincushion of my heart?”

Mr. Villars knew right well that with Lady Lochore, as with the other fair of his acquaintance, his favour fell with the barometer of certain little negotiations. But it was a characteristic—no doubt maternally inherited—that soft as he was upon the pleasure side of nature, when it came to business, he was invulnerable.

At this point Mr. Herrick burst into song. He had a pretty tenor voice:

Come, bring your sampler, and with art Draw in’t a wounded heart And dropping here and there! Not that I think that any dart Can make yours bleed a tear Or pierce it anywhere——

This youth was proud of tracing a collateral relationship with the genial Cavalier singer, whom he was fond of quoting in season and out of season. He was a poet himself, or fancied so; cultivated loose locks, open collars and flying ties—something also of poetic license in other matters

besides verse. But as his spirits were as inexhaustible as his purse—and he was at heart a guileless boy—there were not many who would hold him in rigour.

Lady Lochore looked at him with approval, as he lay stretched at her feet, just then pleasantly occupied in sticking his decapitated daisies into Miss Priscilla's uncovered curls—a process to which that damsel submitted without so much as a blink of her demure eyelid.

"Heart!" echoed Lady Lochore. She had received that morning a postal application for overdue interest, and Tom Villars had been so detachedly sympathetic that there were no tortures she would not now cheerfully have inflicted upon him. "Heart!" she cried again, "why don't you know what is going to happen, when the poor old machine that is Tom Villars comes to a standstill at last——"

"There will be a great concourse of physicians," broke in Colonel Harcourt, whose wit was not equal to his humour, "and when they've taken off his wig and his stays and cut him open——"

"Out will fall," interrupted Herrick, "the portrait of his dear cousin Rebecca—whom he loved in the days of George II.

'Be she likewise one of those That an acre hath of nose——'"

"The physician will find a dreadful little withered fungus," pursued Lady Lochore, unheeding.

"Which," lisped Priscilla, suddenly raising the most innocent eyes in all the world, "which they will send to Master Rickart to find a grand name for, as the deadliest kind of poison that ever set doctors wondering. And sure, 'tisn't poison at all! Master Rickart will say, but just a poor kind of snuff that wouldn't even make a cat sneeze."

Mr. Villars had met Miss Priscilla Geary upon the great oak stair this morning; and, examining her through his single eyeglass, had vowed she

was a rosebud, and pinched her chin—all in a very condescending manner.

“I think you’re all talking very great nonsense,” remarked the Dishonourable Caroline.

Mrs. Geary was comfortably ensconced in a deep garden chair. Now raising her large pale face and protuberant pale eye from a note-book upon which she had been making calculations, she seemed to become aware for the first time of the irresponsible clatter around her.

“Mr. Villars,” she proceeded, in soft gurgling notes not unlike those of the ringdove’s, “I have been just going over last night’s calculations and I think there’s a little error—on your side, dear Mr. Villars.”

Mr. Villars scrambled to his feet, more discomfited by this polite observation than by the broad insolence of the others’ banter.

“My dear Madam, I really think, ah—pray allow me—we went thoroughly into the matter last night.”

The little pupils in Mrs. Geary’s goggling eyes narrowed to pins’ points.

“I do not think anyone can ever accuse me of inaccuracy,” she cooed with emphasis. “Come and look for yourself, Mr. Villars. You owe me still three pounds nine and eightpence—and three farthings.”

“Bianca let Me pay the debt I owe thee, for a kiss!”

sang the irrepressible Herrick—stretching his arms dramatically to Priscilla, and advancing his impudent comely face as if to substantiate the words—upon which she slapped him with little angry fingers outspread; and Lady Lochore first frowned, then laughed; then suddenly sighed.

“Peep-bo, mamma!” cried a high baby voice.

Every line of Lady Lochore's face became softened, at the same time intensified with that wonderful change that her child's presence always brought to her. But her heavy frown instantly came back as she beheld Ellinor, hatless, bearing a glass of milk upon a tray, while, from behind the crisp folds of her skirt, the heir-presumptive of Lochore (and Bindon) peeped roguishly at his mother.

Herrick sprang to his feet. Colonel Harcourt turned his brown face to measure the new-comer with his frank eye and then rose also.

"Hebe," said he, looking down with admiration at the fresh, sun-kissed cheek and the sun-illumined head, "Hebe, with the nectar of the God!"

He took the tray from her hand.

"Give me my milk," said Lady Lochore. "Edmund, come here! Come here, darling. Are you thirsty? You shall drink out of mother's glass. Come here, sir, this minute! Really, Mrs. Marvel, you should not take him from his nurse like this!"

With a shrill cry the child rushed back to Ellinor and clutched her skirt again, announcing in his wilful way that he would have no nasty milk, and that he loved the pretty lady. Ellinor had some little ado to restore him to his mother. Then, seeing him firmly captured at last by the end of his tartan sash, she stood a moment facing Lady Lochore's vindictive eyes with scornful placidity.

"My father hopes you will drink the milk, cousin Maud," said she, "and if you would add to it the little packet of powder that lies beside it on the tray, he bids me say that it would be most beneficial to your cough."

For all response Lady Lochore drank off the glass; then handed back the tray to Ellinor as if she had been a servant, the little powder conspicuously untouched. Ellinor looked from one to the other of the two

men; then with a fine careless gesture passed her burden to Herrick, and, without another word, walked away up the terrace steps.

Herrick glanced after her, glanced at the tray in his hand, and breaking into a quick laugh, promptly thrust it into Colonel Harcourt's hands and scurried off in pursuit. Colonel Harcourt good-humouredly echoed the laugh, as he finally deposited the object on the grass, then stood in his turn, gazing philosophically after the two retreating figures that were now progressing side by side, while Lady Lochore and her son out-wrangled Mrs. Geary and Mr. Villars.

"'Pon my soul," said Colonel Harcourt, "*vera incessu patuit Dea*. That woman walks as well as any I've ever seen!"

Lady Lochore caught the words, and they added to the irritation with which she was endeavouring to stifle her son's protestation that he hated mamma.

"I'll have you know who's master, sir!" she cried, pinning down the struggling arms with sudden anger.

"I'm master. I am the little Master of Lochore—and Margery says I'm to be the little master here!"

The mother suddenly relaxed her grasp of him and sat stonily gazing at him while he rubbed his chubby arm and stared back at her with pouting lips. The next moment she went down on her knees beside him, and took him up in her arms, smothering him with kisses.

"Darling, so he shall be, darling, darling!"

A panting nurse here rushed upon the scene.

"Wretch!" exclaimed my lady, "you are not worth your salt! How dare you let the child escape you. Yes, take him, take him!—the weight of him!"

She caught Harcourt’s eye fixed reflectively upon her.

“Come and walk with me,” she commanded.

“I was two by honours, you remember,” cooed Mrs. Geary.

“I am positive, the Deyvil take my soul, Madam! But ’tis my score you are marking instead of your own!”

Deserted Priscilla sat making reflective bunches of daisies. She had not once looked up since Herrick so unceremoniously left her.

The sky was still as blue, the grass as green, the flowers as bright, the whole summer’s day as lovely; but fret and discord had crept in among them.

# BOOK III — CHAPTER II TOTTERING LIFE AND FORTUNE

## CHAPTER II TOTTERING LIFE AND FORTUNE

... Loathsome sight, How from the rosy lips of life and love Flashed the bare grinning skeleton of death! White was her cheek; sharp breaths of anger puff'd Her nostrils.... —TENNYSON (*Merlin and Vivien*).

With head erect, Lady Lochore walked on between the borders of lilies. The path was so narrow and the lilies had grown to such height and luxuriance that they struck heavily against her; and each time, like swinging censers, sent gushes of perfume up towards the hot blue sky.

Colonel Harcourt went perforce a step behind her, just avoiding to tread on her garments as they trailed, dragging the little pebbles on the hot grey soil. Now and again he mopped his brow. He liked neither the sun on his back nor the strong breath of the flowers, nor this aimless promenade. But, in his dealings with women, he had kept an invariable rule of almost exaggerated deference in little things, and he had found that he could go further in great ones than most men who disdained such nicety.

Suddenly Lady Lochore stopped and began to cough. Then she wheeled round and looked at Harcourt with irate eyes over the folds of her handkerchief she was pressing to her lips.

Anthony Harcourt possessed a breast as hard as granite, withal an easy superficial gentlemanly benevolence which did very well for the world in lieu of deeper feeling; and a great deal better for himself. He was quite shocked at the sound of that cough; still more so when Lady Lochore

flung out the handkerchief towards him with the inimitable gesture of the living tragedy and showed it to him stained with blood.

“Look at that, Tony,” said she, “and tell me how long do you think it will be before I bark myself to death?”

Her cheek was scarlet and her eyes shone with unnatural brilliance in their wasted sockets. She swayed a little as she stood, like the lilies about her; and indeed she herself looked like some passionate southern flower wasting life and essence even as one looked at her.

“Come out of this heat,” said Harcourt. He took her left arm and placed it within his; led her to a stone bench in the shade. She sat down with an impatient sigh, passed the back of the hand he had held impatiently over her wet forehead and closed her eyes. In her right hand, crushed upon her lap, the stained cambric lay hidden.

“Is not this better,” said her companion, as if he were speaking to a child, “out of that sunshine and the sickly smell of those flowers? Here we get the breeze from the woods and the scent of the hay. A sort of little heaven after a successful imitation of the infernal regions.”

“If you mean Hell, why don’t you say Hell?” said Lady Lochore. She laughed in that bitterness of soul that can find no expression but in irony. “Bah!” she went on, half to herself. “It’s no use trying not to believe in Hell, my friend; you have to, when you’ve got it in you! Look here,” she suddenly blazed her unhappy eyes upon him. “Look here, Tony—honour, now! How long do you give me?”

All the man’s superficial benevolence looked sadly at her from his handsome face.

“I am no doctor.”

“Faugh! Subterfuge!”

“Why, then, at the rate going, not three months,” said he. “But, with rational care, I’ve no doubt, as long as most.”

“Not three months!” She clenched her right hand convulsively and glanced down at the white folds escaping from her fingers as if they contained her death warrant. “Thank, you, Tony. You’re a beast at heart, like the rest of us, but you’re a gentleman. I am going at a rapid rate, am I not? Oh, God! I shouldn’t care—what’s beyond can’t be worse than what’s here. But it’s the child!”

The man made no answer. He had the tact of all situations. Here silence spoke the sympathy that was deeper than words. There was a pause, Lady Lochore drew her breath in gasps.

“It’s a pretty state of affairs here,” she said, at last, with her hard laugh.

“You mean——?”

“I mean my sanctimonious brother and his prudish lady!”

“Surely——?” He raised his eyebrows in expressive query.

“Not she!” cried Lady Lochore in passionate disgust. “I would think the better of her if she did. No, she’s none of those who deem the world well lost for love. Oh, she’ll calculate! She’ll give nothing for nothing! She’s laid her plans.” Lady Lochore began reckoning on three angry fingers uplifted. “There’s the equivocal position—one; my brother’s diseased notions of honour—two; her own bread-and-butter comeliness—three. She’ll hook him, Tony. She’ll hook him, and my boy will go a beggar! Lochore has pretty well ruined us as it is.”

“I should not regard Sir David as a marrying man, myself,” said the colonel soothingly.

“No,” said she, “the last man in the world to marry, but the first to be married on some preposterous claim! Look here, Tony, we are old

friends. I have not walked you off here to waste your time. You know that my fortunes are in even more rapid decline than myself. There's the child; he is the heir to this place. Before God, what is it to me, but the child and his rights! I'll fight for them till I die. Not much of a boast, you say, but when a woman's pushed to it, as I am"—her voice failed her. There was something awful in the contrast between the energy of her passion and the frailness of her body and in the way they reacted one upon another.

"Poor soul!" said Colonel Harcourt to himself—and his kind eyes were almost suffused.

"Tony, Tony!" she panted in a whisper of frantic intensity, "you can help. Oh, don't look like that! I know I'm boring you, but I'll not bore anyone for long. Think what it means to me! Fool! As if any man could understand! Don't be afraid, I won't ask anything hard of you. Only to make love to the rosy dairymaid, to the prim housekeeper, to the pretty widow. Why, man, you can't keep your wicked eyes off her as it is!"

He leaned back against the bench, crossed one shapely leg over the other, closed his eyes and laughed gently to himself. Lady Lochore, bending forward, measured him with a swift glance, and her lips parted in a sneer.

"You're but a lazy fellow. You like your peach growing at your elbow. You've been afraid of hurting my feelings ... you have been so long regarded as my possession! Oh, Tony, that's all over now. Listen—if you don't know the ways of woman, who does? The case is very plain: that creature is planning to compromise David. I know how you can make love when you choose, and I know my fool of a brother. I'll have her compromised first! And then——"

She pressed her hands to her heart, then to her throat; for a moment or two the poor body had struck work. Only her eyes pleaded, threatened.

"And then? Before the Lord, you ladies!"

For all his *bonhommie de viveur*, Colonel Harcourt, of the First Guards, was known about Town to be a good deal of "a tiger," as the cant of the day had it; and he held a justified reputation as an expert with the "saw-handle and hair-trigger." Conscious of this, he went on:

"Truly, Maud, it may well be said there's never a man sent below but a woman showed the way! But is there not something a little crude in your plan?"

"Crude! Have I time to be mealy-mouthed? I'm not asking you anything very hard, God knows! Merely to follow your own bent, Tony Harcourt; you have had your way with me, but that is over now, and you know it. I want you to devote yourself to that piece of country bloom instead. In three months you know what I shall be!..."

"My dear Maud.... And then?" He was amused no longer: Lady Lochore was undeniably crude. "A regular conspiracy!" he went on. But, after a moment's musing, a gleam came into his eye. "What of it!" he cried, "all's fair in love and war—a soldier's motto, and it has been mine! And as for you, why, your spirits would keep twenty alive!"

She laughed scornfully.

"It sounds better to say so, anyhow," she retorted. "I don't want any mewing over me. So it's a bargain, Tony? For old sake's sake you'll go against all your principles and make love to a pretty woman? And we'll have this new Pamela out of the citadel. We'll have this scheming dairy-wench shown up in her true colours! My precious brother, as you know, or you don't know, has got some rather freakish notions about women. He's had a slap in the face once already, and it turned him silly. Disgust him of this second love affair, he'll never have a third and I shall die in peace. You have marked the affectionate, fraternal way in which he treats me! I had to force my way back into this house. He'll never forgive me for marrying Lochore—and as for Lochore himself, to the

trump of doom David will never forgive him for.... Bah! for doing him the best turn one man ever did another!"

"And what was that?" asked the colonel, with a slight yawn.

"What you and I are going to do now," said my Lady. She smoothed her ruffled hair, folded her stained kerchief and slipped it into her bag; rose, and looked down smiling once more at the man, her fine nostrils fluttering with her quick breath in a way that gave a singular expression of mocking cruelty to her face. "Lochore saved Sir David from marrying beneath him."

"And how did he accomplish that?" asked the colonel, rising too.

There was now a faint flutter of curiosity in his breast The reasons for Sir David's eccentricity had once been much discussed. Lady Lochore took two steps down the path, then looked back over her shoulder.

"In the simplest way in the world," she answered. "He gave a greedy child an apple, while my simpleton of a brother was solemnly forging a wedding ring."

"Why"—the colonel stared, then laughed—"my Lady," said he "these are strange counsels! Why—absurd! How could I think the plump, pretty Phyllis would as much as blink at an old fogey like me. And, as for me——"

Again Lady Lochore turned her head and looked long and fully at the speaker.

"Oh, Tony!" she said slowly at last. "Tony, Tony!"

Colonel Harcourt tried in vain to present a set face of innocence; the self-conscious smile of the gratified *roué* quivered on his lips. He broke into a sudden loud laugh and wagged his head at her. She dropped her eyelids for a second to shut out the sight.

“And she bit into the apple?” asked the colonel, presently.

“With all her teeth, my dear friend. Heavens! isn’t the world’s history but one long monotonous repetition? With us Eves, everything depends upon the way the fruit is offered. And that is why, I suppose, it is seldom Adam and his legitimate orchard that tempts us. Reflect on that, Tony.”

With this fleer, and a careless forbidding motion of her hand, she left him standing and looking after her.

There was a mixture of admiration and distrust in his eyes.

“By George, what a woman!” said he. “Gad, I’m glad I am not her Adam, anyhow!”

Then his glance grew veiled, as it fixed itself upon an inward thought, and a slow complacent smile crept upon his face.

# BOOK III — CHAPTER III STRAWS ON THE WIND

CHAPTER III STRAWS ON THE WIND

... I feel my genial spirits droop, My hopes all flat.... —MILTON (*Samson Agonistes*).

“I never heard you, my dear Doctor, preach better!” said Madam Tutterville.

But the worthy lady’s countenance was overcast as she spoke; and the hands which were smoothing and folding the surplice that the parson had just laid aside were shaking. The reverend Horatio turned upon his spouse with a philosophic smile. The lady did not use to seek him thus in the sacristy after service unless something in the Sunday congregation seemed to call for her immediate comment. On this particular morning he well knew where the thorn pricked; for he himself, mounting to the pulpit with the consciousness of an extra-polished discourse awaiting that choice Oxford delivery which had so rare a chance of being appreciated, had not seen without a pang of vexation that the Bindon House pew was empty save for its usual occupant—Mrs. Marvel. Having promptly overcome his small weakness and proceeded with his sermon with all the eloquence he would have bestowed on the expected cultivated, or at least fashionable, audience, he was now all the more ready to banter his wife upon her distress.

“What is the matter, dear Sophia?”

“An ungrateful and reprobate generation! He that will not hear the church, let him be to thee as the heathen and the publican!” cried Madam,

suddenly rolling the surplice into a tight bundle and indignantly gesticulating with it.

“How now! has Joe Mossmason been snoring under your very nose, or has Barbara——”

“Tush, tush, Doctor! You know right well what I mean. Was not that empty pew a scandal and a disgrace? Bindon House full of guests and not one to come and bend the knee to their Lord!”

“And admire my rolling periods, is it not so, my faithful spouse?” quoth the parson good-naturedly.

“I took special care to remind them of the hour of service last night; not, indeed, that I ever expected anything of Maud; although she might well be thinking that in every cough she gives she can find the hand-writing on the wall. Amen, amen, I come like a thief in the night!”

The parson’s eyelids contracted slightly, but he made no reply. Seating himself in the wooden armchair, he began with some labour to encircle his unimpeachable legs with the light summer gaiters that their unprotected, silk-stocking state demanded for out-door walking.

“My dear Horatio, what are you doing? Allow me!” She was down on her knees in a second; and while, with her amazing activity of body, she wielded the button-hook, her tongue never ceased to wag under the stress of her equally amazing activity of mind.

“But that card-playing woman—that Jezebel—one would have thought she’d have had the decency to open a prayer-book on the day when the commandments of the Lord forbid her to shuffle a pack; she’s old enough to know better!”

“I’m not so sure,” said the reverend Horatio, complacently stretching out the other leg, “that she interprets the Sabbath ordinance in that spirit.”

“Horatio!” ejaculated the outraged churchwoman, “you do not mean to insinuate that such simony could take place within our diocese as card-playing on the Sunday?”

“I think, from what I have seen from the Honourable Mrs. Geary, that she is likely to show more interest in the card-tables than in the tables of Moses.”

He laughed gently.

“Talking of Moses,” cried Madam Tutterville, feverishly buttoning, “there’s that Mr. Villars—one would have thought he would come, if only to show himself a Christian.”

But she was careful, even in her righteous exasperation, not to nip her parson’s tender flesh.

“Thank you, Sophia!”

He rose and reached for his broad-brimmed hat; then suddenly perceiving from his wife’s empurpled cheek and trembling lip that the slight had gone deeper than he thought, he patted her on the shoulder and said in an altered manner:

“Come, come, Sophia, let us remember that fortunately we are not responsible for the shortcomings of Lady Lochore’s guests. Indeed, from what I saw last night, it is a matter of far deeper moment to consider the effect of their presence upon those two who are dear to us at Bindon.”

“You mean, Doctor?”

“I did not like David’s looks, my dear. I fear the strain and the disgust, and the effort to repress himself, are too much for him. And besides”—he paused a moment—“I don’t know that I altogether liked Ellinor’s looks either.”

“My dear Horatio! I thought I had never seen her so gay and so handsome.”

“Too gay, Sophia, and too handsome. So Mr. Herrick and Colonel Harcourt not to speak of that pitiable person, Mr. Villars, seem to find her. She appears to me to take their admiration with rather more ease than is perhaps altogether wise in a young woman in her position. I do not say,” he went on, bearing down the lady’s horrified exclamation—“I do not go so far as yourself in surmising that David had formed any serious attachment in that quarter; but then, you see, it might have ripened into one. There is no doubt there was a singular air of peace and happiness about Bindon before this most undesirable influx. But last night David’s eyes——” He broke off, readied for his cane and moved towards the porch.

“My dear sir,” panted Madam Tutterville after him, “you have plunged me in very deep anxiety! We seem indeed, as Paul says, to be going from Scyllis to Charybda! Pray proceed with your sentence—David’s eyes?”

But the parson had already repented.

“Nay, it is after all but a small matter. All I mean is that this noise, this wrangling, this frivolity, this trivial mirth, which is, after all, but the crackling of thorns, is peculiarly distasteful to such a man as David, and I was only sorry that your niece should seem to countenance it.”

“I will speak to her,” announced Madam Tutterville. “I will instantly seek her.”

“Nay,” said her lord, “my dear Sophia, here we have no right to interfere. Ellinor has sufficient experience of the world to be left to her own devices. I understand that Colonel Harcourt and Mr. Herrick are neither of them a mean *parti*, and, unless I am seriously mistaken, the younger man at least is genuinely enamoured. By what right can we permit our

own secret wishes, our own rather wild match-making plans, to step in here?"

"Oh, dear!" sighed Sophia. "And we were so comfortable!"

The two stood arm-in-arm at the lych-gate and absently watched the last of their parishioners straggling homeward in groups through the avenue trees. Suddenly Madam Tutterville touched her husband's arm and pointed with a dramatic gesture in the direction of the House.

Two tall slight figures were moving side by side across the sunlit green. Even as the rector looked a third, emerging from the shadows of the beeches, joined them with sweeping gestures of greeting.

"They have been, I declare, lying in wait for Ellinor ... and there she goes off between them, Sunday morning and all!"

Deeply shocked and annoyed was Madam Tutterville.

"I think," said the parson, "that I will take an hour's rest in the garden. I would, my dear Sophia, you had as soothing an acquaintance, on such an occasion as Ovid."

# BOOK III — CHAPTER IV A SHOCK AND A REVELATION

## CHAPTER IV A SHOCK AND A REVELATION

Into these sacred shades (quoth she) How dar'st thou be so bold To enter, consecrate to me, Or touch this hallowed mould? —MICHAEL DRAYTON (*Quest of Cynthia*).

Ellinor sat on the stone bench in the Herb-Garden, gazing disconsolately at the flourishing bed of *Euphrosinum*—at the Star-of-Comfort—and reviewing the events of the past days with a heavy and discomforted heart.

It is but seldom now that she could find a few minutes of solitude, so many were the claims upon her time. For, besides the household duties and Master Simon's unconscious tyranny, she was subjected to a kind of persecution of admiration on the part of Bindon's male guests. There were times, indeed, when Colonel Harcourt's shadowing attendance became so embarrassing that she was glad to turn to the protection which the boyish worship of Luke Herrick afforded.

With the former she felt instinctively that under an almost exaggerated gentleness and deference there lurked a gathering danger; whereas the youthful poet, however exuberant in his devotion, was not only a harmless, but a sympathetic companion.

While she was far from realising the peril in which she stood where her dearest hopes were concerned, she felt the difficulty of her position increase at every turn. Forced by David's wish into the society of his visitors, she was there completely ostracised by the ladies after an art only known to the feminine community. Thus she was thrown upon the

mercies of the gentlemen, and they were extended to her with but too ready charity. It would not have been in human nature not to talk and laugh with Luke Herrick when Miss Priscilla was going by, her little nose in the air. It was impossible not to accept with a smiling grace the chair, the footstool, the greeting offered to her with a mixture of paternal and courtierlike solicitude, amid the icy silence and the drawing away of skirts whenever she entered upon the circle.

Now and again, perhaps, her laugh may have been a little too loud, her smile a shade too sweet; but she would not have been a woman had the insulting attitude of the other women not led her to some reprisals. Moreover there was a deep sore place in her soul which cried out that he who should by rights be her protector held himself too scornfully aloof; nay, that he actually included her now and again in the cold glance which he swept round the table upon his unwelcome guests. To the end of the chapter a woman will always seize the obvious weapon wherewith to fight the indifference of the man she loves, and nine times out of ten it is herself she wounds therewith.

The basket that was to hold the health of the village was still empty by her side. Absently she fingered a sprig of wormwood—meet emblem, she thought, of her present mood. Indeed, Ellinor's thoughts were not often so bitter. Not often was her brave spirit so dashed.

There came a light rapid step behind her, a burst of laughter; and, as she turned, the triumphant face of Herrick met her glance at so slight a distance from her own that she drew back in double indignation.

"Why have you followed me?" she exclaimed indignantly. "You know that no one is allowed here!"

"How can I choose but love and follow her Whose shadow smells like mild pomander? How can I choose but——"

The gay voice broke off suddenly, and a flush—fellow to that of Ellinor, yet one of engaging embarrassment, overspread the singer's face.

"Well, sir?" she asked.

How stern, how stiff, how unapproachable, this woman whom nature had made of such soft lovely stuff! Luke Herrick stooped, lifted a corner of her muslin apron, and carried it humbly to his lips.

"How could I choose but kiss her! Whence does come The storax, spikenard, myrrh and labdanum?"

he went on, dropping his recitative note for what was almost a whisper. From his suppliant posture he looked up with eyes in which the man pleaded, yet where the boy's irrepressible, irresponsible mischievousness still lurked. It was impossible not to feel that anger was an absurd weapon against so frivolous a foe. Moreover she liked him. There was something infectious in his mercurial humour, something attractive in the honest boy nature that lay open for all to read. There was something of a relief, also, to be obliged to jest and to laugh. To be near him was like meeting a breeze from some lost, careless youth.

Why, after all, should she not try and forget her own troubles? What was the Herb-Garden to him, to David, that, with a fond faithfulness she should insist on keeping it consecrate to the memory of one dawn! He who had begged for the key of it—what use had he made of the gift? How many a golden morning, how many a pearly day-break, how many an amethyst evening, had she haunted the scented enclosure—always alone!

"I'll not say a single little word," he urged. "I'll be as mute as a sundial, if you'll only let me bask in your radiance! I'll just hold your basket and your scissors, and I'll chew every single herb and tell you whether its taste be sweet, sour or bitter, if you'll only give me a leaf between your white fingers. And then if I die——"

He thumped his ruffled shirt and languished.

“How did you get in?” she asked.

But though her tone was still rebuking, he laughed back into her blue eyes. He made a gesture: she saw the traces of moss, of lichen and crumbling mortar upon his kerseymere, the rent in his lace ruffle, the tiny broken twig that had caught his crisp curl.

“Ah,” she cried, “you have found my old secret scaling place.... Did you land in the balm bed?” she asked, laughing.

Colonel Harcourt, in search of Ellinor, looked in through the locked gate and knocked once or twice, then called gently. But, though he could hear bursts of laughter and the intermingling sounds of voices in gay conversation, he could see nothing but the strange herb-beds and bushes, intersected by narrow paths, overhung by swarmlets of humming bees and other honey-seeking insects; and no one seemed to hear him.

As he stood, smiling to himself in good humoured cynicism, the tall figure of his host, with bare head, came slowly out of the laurel walk that led to the open plot before the gate. Sir David seemed absorbed in thought. And it was not until he was within a pace or two of the other man that he suddenly looked up.

“Good morning!” said the colonel genially. “A lovely day, is it not? Queer place, that old garden of weeds—our friend, Master Simon’s herbary, as I understand. The gate is locked, I find.”

As he spoke, Colonel Harcourt scanned the set, pallid face with a keen curiosity. It required all a sick woman’s disordered fancy (he told himself) to imagine that this cold-blooded student, this walking symbol of abstractedness should be in danger of being led away into romantic folly. The soldier’s full smiling lips parted still more broadly, as he went on to reflect that, whatever designs the pretty widow might have upon her

cousin's fortune, her warm splendid personality was scarce likely to be attracted by "this long, thin, icy, fish of a fellow!"

Sir David had inclined his head gravely on the other's greeting. When the hearty voice had rattled off its speech, he answered that he regretted that it was the rule to admit no visitors to the Herb-Garden. And then drew a key from his pocket and slipped it into the lock, so completely ignoring his guest's persistent proximity, that the colonel, as a man of breeding would have felt it incumbent upon him to retire, had he not special reasons for standing his ground.

"Indeed!" said he. "Forbidden ground?"

"Yes, the plants are many of them deadly poison. It is a necessary precaution."

"No doubt—quite right. Very prudent. But—what about the charming Mrs. Ellinor Marvel, the beauteous widow, the bewitching and amiable cousin, whom you are fortunate to have as companion in this romantic house?"

David dropped his hand from the key, turned and fixed his grave eyes on the speaker. Their expression was merely one of waiting for the next remark. The colonel hardly felt quite as assured of his ground as before, but he resumed in the same tone of banter:

"I saw her going there just now. Is it quite safe to let so precious a being into such dangerous precincts?"

The remark ended with that laugh upon the hearty note of which so much of his popularity rested. Most people found it impossible not to respond to this breezy way of Colonel Harcourt's. But there was not a flicker of change upon Sir David's countenance.

Yet, when he spoke, after coldly pausing till the other's mirth should have utterly ceased, and remarked that his cousin, Mrs. Marvel, was

associated with her father's scientific investigations and therefore was the only person, besides the speaker himself, whom he allowed to make use of the garden, the colonel felt that his insinuation had been understood and rebuked by a courtesy severer than anger. His resentment suddenly rose. The easy contempt with which he had hitherto regarded the uncongenial personality of his host, flamed on the instant into active dislike; and he was glad to have a weapon in his hand which might find a joint in this irritatingly impenetrable armour.

"Indeed!" cried he, ruffled out of his usual commanding urbanity.—Trying to smile he found himself sneering. "Indeed? Aha, very good, I declare! It is worth while living on a tower to be able to retain those confiding views of life! It has never struck you, I suppose—the stars are doubtless never in the least irregular in their courses, but young and charming widows have little ways of their own—it has never struck you that this forbidden wilderness might be an ideal spot for rendezvous?"

Sir David shot at the speaker a look very unlike that far-off indifferent glance which was all he had hitherto vouchsafed him. This sudden, steel-bright, concentrated gaze was like the baring of a blade. Dim stories of the recluse's romantic and violent youth began to stir in Harcourt's memory. He straightened his own sturdy figure and the instinctive hot defiance of the fighter at the first hint of an opposing spirit ran tingling to his stiffening muscles.

So, for a quick-breathing moment, they fixed each other. Then, through the drowsy humming summer stillness rang from within the Herb-Garden the note of Herrick's singing voice:

"Go, lovely rose and, interwove With other flowers, bind my love. Tell her too, she must not be, Longer flowing, longer free——"

The melody broke off. There was a burst of laughter; and then Ellinor's voice, with an unusual sound of young merriment in it, sprang up into hearing as a crystal fountain springs into sight:

"Foolish boy, there are no roses here!"

Sir David started. His eyes remained fixed, but they no longer saw. In yet another moment he had turned away and was gone, leaving Colonel Harcourt staring after him.

"'Pon my life," said the *roué* to himself, "the woman was right—My God, he's mad for her!"

Upon a second and more composed thought, he began to chuckle and feel his own personality resume its lost importance.

"The situation is becoming interesting," he thought. His eye fell on the key, forgotten in the lock and he broke into a short laugh. He then unlocked the gate, slipped the key into his pocket and walked into the garden.

"I had no idea," he said, addressing the balm beds, as he passed them, "that I could be such a useful friend to my Lady."

# BOOK III — CHAPTER V SILENT NIGHT THE REFUGE

## CHAPTER V SILENT NIGHT THE REFUGE

My life has crept so long on a broken wing Thro' cells of madness, haunts of horror and fear, That I come to be grateful at last for a little thing: My mood is changed, for it fell at a time of year When the face of night is fair on the dewy downs ... and the Charioteer And starry Gemini hang like glorious crowns Over Orion's grave low down in the west. —TENNYSON.

Ellinor had had, perforce, so busy an afternoon (to make up for time lost in the morning) that, marshalled by Lady Lochore, all the guests were already at table when she came in that night.

She stood a moment framed in the doorway, a brilliant apparition. Despite its many candelabras and the soft light that still poured into it through open windows, the great room—oak-panelled and oak-ceiled—was of its essence richly dark. Nearly black were those panels, polished by centuries to inimitable gloss and reflecting the flames of the candles like so many little yellow crocuses.—Such walls are the best background for fair women and fine clothes; for roses and silver and gold.

This evening Ellinor had been moved—though she hardly knew why—to discard her severely simple gowns for a relic of the early days of her married life, a garment of a fashion already passed. In the embroidered fabric she was clothed as a flower is clothed by its sheath. A narrow white satin train with a heavy border of little golden roses fell from her shoulders in folds that accentuated her height. The classic cut, that laid bare a sweep of neck and arm that not another woman in the county could

boast, became her as simplicity does royalty. The mingling of the white and gold was repeated by her skin and hair. As she cast a last look at herself, in the mirror before leaving her room, a smile of innocent delight had parted her lips. She had seen herself beautiful—how beautiful she was, she herself indeed did not know. She had thought of David and had been glad. The ever more open admiration with which both Herrick and Colonel Harcourt had surrounded her throughout the day had stimulated her in some strange, but very feminine and quite pure, manner, to make better use of these gifts of hers to pleasure the eyes of the man she loved.

Now Lady Lochore was the first to see her on her entrance. She put up her eyeglasses and stared, and then dropped them with a pale convulsion which turned the next moment to a vindictive smile.

Colonel Harcourt followed the direction of her eyes and positively started with a frank stare of delight. He wheeled boldly round to feast his eyes at ease; the action and the attitude were almost equivalent to applause. Then it seemed to Ellinor that every head was turned, that every eye was upon her; and her innocent assurance suddenly failed her. Timidly she shot a glance towards the head of the table. Alas! everyone was looking at her, except him whose gaze alone meant anything. All her childish pleasure fell from her.

She advanced composedly enough, however, and took the only vacant seat, which was between the colonel and young Herrick, vaguely responding to their advance. After a while a sort of invincible attraction made her look up. She met David’s eyes—met the chill of death where she had expected the warmth of life!

What had happened? Her heart seemed to wither away, the smile was paralysed on her lips; the flowers, the lights, the flashes of silver and colour, the babel of talk about her—it all became nightmare, an unreal world of mocking shadows, in which one thing only was horribly and intensely alive, the pain of her sudden misery. After a moment, however,

some kind of self-possession returned. The pressing exigency that weighs upon us all, of preserving our bearing in company, no matter whether soul or body be at torture, forced her to answer the running fire of remarks that seemed to be levelled at her with diabolical persistency.

Even the kind, friendly presence of the rectory pair seemed destined that night to add to her difficulty; for while uncle Horatio was quoting Greek at her across the table, Madam Tutterville was assuring her neighbors that if Mrs. Marvel was unpunctual for once she was nevertheless the faithful virgin with lamp in excellent condition, who knew how to trim her wicks; and was, in fact, the strong woman of Proverbs who got up early.

“One rose in the fair garden was missing, and I missed her!” said the rector, poetically, while he turned an affectionate glance upon his niece.

“Dear uncle Horatio,” said she, “I had rather be greeted by you than acclaimed by a court.”

“Horrible, horrible cruel to poor adoring courtiers!” murmured Colonel Harcourt in her ear.

At any moment, that confidential lowering of the voice, that bold intimacy of the gaze would have excited Ellinor’s swiftest rebuke; but now she only laughed nervously as she endeavoured to rally in reply to Herrick’s equally low-pitched, but quite guileless show of interest.

“What is the matter with you?” he was whispering; “you went as white as a sheet just now. Has anyone annoyed you? Do tell me!”

“I, white—what nonsense!” she cried; and her voice rang a little louder and harder than usual in her effort, while the rush of blood that had succeeded her momentary faintness left an unusual scarlet on both cheeks. “Why, I am burning! And so would you be if you had spent the day between the alembic stove and the kitchen!”

“Perhaps,” said Miss Priscilla, lifting her innocent eyes to shoot baby-anger across at the neglectful Herrick, “perhaps,” she said, in her small soft voice, “it also was sitting so long in the sun in the Herb-Garden, that’s given you that colour. There’s Mister Luke has got the match of it himself.”

Lady Lochore gave a loud laugh.

“Mrs. Marvel has so many irons in the fire!” she suggested.

Ellinor looked round the table. She seemed to remain the centre of notice: on the part of the women (with the exception of aunt Sophia) an inimical, almost vindictive notice; while, where the men were concerned, she could not turn her gaze without meeting glances of undisguised hot admiration. Instinctively, as if for help, she again sought David’s gaze, and again was thrown back into indescribable terror and bewilderment by his countenance. Only once through all the phases of gloom, discouragement, renunciation that his soul had passed through in her company, had she seen his features wear that deathlike mask—it was when he had battled with himself before reading his sister’s letter. And now this repudiation, nay, this contempt of things, was directed—she felt it with a nightmare sense of inevitableness—towards herself. Herself!

Oh, the torture of that long elaborate repast, the nauseating weariness of the ceaseless round of dishes, the inane ceremonies of wine-taking, the glass clinking, the jokes, the laughter, the compliments, the struggle to parry the spiteful or the too ardent innuendo, to laugh with the rest at Aunt Sophia’s happy inaccuracy, to respond to her proud congratulations over the success of each remove! Ellinor’s life had not been an easy one; but no harder hour had it ever meted out to her than this.

Parson Tutterville had suddenly become grave and silent. His kind, shrewd gaze had wandered several times from the gloom of David’s countenance to the flush upon Ellinor’s cheek. Then, with fixed eyes, fell

into a reflection so profound that—most unusual occurrence in the amiable epicure's existence—the superb wine before him waited in vain to whisper its fragrant secret, and the most artistic succulence was left untasted upon his plate.

When the party at length broke up, he himself, in a coign of vantage, caught Ellinor's arm as she passed him.

"My dear child," he said under his voice, "something must have happened! I have not seen David look like this since the old evil days—the Black Dog is sitting on his shoulder with a vengeance! What is it?"

Ellinor's lip quivered. She shook her head, words failed her. A shade of severity crept into the rector's face.

"Have you quarrelled?"

Again the mute reply.

"Have you nothing to tell me? Ah, child, take care; David is not like other men! His mind is a complicated piece of machinery—and the common tools, Ellinor, will only work havoc here!"

Ellinor's sore heart was stabbed again. She understood the veiled rebuke; and the injustice of it so hurt her that to hide her tears, she broke from the kind hand and rushed from the room in the wake of the disdainful petticoats that had just swept by her.

Parson Tutterville looked after her with puzzled air; then, sighing, returned to the table. Here David was dispensing the hospitality of Bindon's matchless cellar, discoursing to his guests in a mood of irony so bitter yet so intangible as to fill the rector with fresh alarm.

The reverend Horatio took his seat at the right of the master; and, without a spark of interest, watched the pale hand busy among the decanters fill

his beaker. He would, indeed, have preferred not to put his lips to it, had the exigencies of the social moment but permitted it, so utterly had that smile of David's turned its flavour for him.

"By George!" exclaimed the colonel, flinging himself luxuriously back in his chair and speaking with the enthusiasm of an experienced sensualist, "by George, a glorious tipple! Enough to turn the whitest-livered cur into a hero! Come, come, gentlemen, we must not let such grape juice run down our throats unconsecrate, as if we were beasts. Let us dedicate every drop of it.—A toast, a toast!"

He had reached that agreeable state which should be the aim of the expert diner at this crucial moment of the repast. He had eaten well and had drunk wisely; and was now on the fine border line where the utmost enjoyment of the sober man merges into the first elevation of spirit of the slightly intoxicated.

"I propose our amiable host," he went on, just as Herrick, springing to his feet and raising his glass exclaimed:

"There can be here but one worthy toast—the fair ones of Bindon."

"Our Queens, our Goddesses, our Nymphs, our Angels!" interrupted Villars, with his usual inspiration.

"Our fair ones!" echoed David, rising also; "indeed nothing could be more just than that we should devote the blood wrung from the grape that makes, as Colonel Harcourt truly says, heroes of mankind, to woman, that other spring of all our noble actions. Is it not so, my gallant Colonel?"

"Hear him, hear!" cried innocent Herrick, beating the table with an excited hand.

David's glacial eye fell for a moment on the hot boy-face, and there flickered in it a kind of faint pity. So, one might fantastically fancy,

would a spirit recently rent from the body by an agonising death, look from its own corpse upon those who had yet to die.

“Let us drink,” said David, and raised his glass, “to Woman! Without her what should we know of ourselves, of our friends, of the treasures of the human heart and the nobility of the human mind, of honour, of purity, of faithfulness!”

Dr. Tutterville looked up at the speaker, resting his hand on the table in the attitude of one prepared to spring forward in an emergency. As David’s voice rang out ever more incisive he was reminded of the breaking of sheets of ice under the stress of dark waters below.

“A moment, please,” here intervened Colonel Harcourt’s mellow note. “Friend Herrick’s excellent suggestion, and our host’s most eloquent adoption of it, can yet (craving your pardon, gentlemen) be amended. Let us not dilute the enjoyment of this excellent moment—let us concentrate it, as good Master Simon would say. Gentlemen, this glass not to women, but to the one woman! Come, parson, up with you! Fie—what would Madam Tutterville say? And he has but given half his heart who fears to proclaim its mistress. Hoy! Gone away! And out on you if you shy at the fence! I drink to Mistress Marvel—to the marvel of Marvels, aha!”

He tossed down his glass, looking coolly at David, while Herrick, leaning forward with the furious eyes of the young lover stung, glared across the table and balanced his own glass in his hand with an intent which another second had seen carried out, had not the parson’s fingers quietly closed upon his; had not the parson’s voice murmured in his ear:

“Remember, my young friend, that the imprudent champion is a lady’s greatest enemy.”

This while Villars, on his side, sputtering into silly laughter, protested that fair play was a jewel and that if Harcourt had stolen a march upon him, he Villars might yet be in “at the death!”

David stood still, glass in hand, dangerously still, while his eyes first wandered round the table, from face to face, and then beyond out to the midsummer twilight sky that shone through the parted folds of the curtains. And then the parson, who was watching him, saw a marvellous change come over the bitter passion of his face. It was as if the mask had fallen away. The rigid composure, the tense lines relaxed, the sombre eye was lit with a new light; and ethereal peace touched the troubled forehead.

Wondering, the divine turned to the window also; followed the direction of David's abstracted gaze and saw how, in the placid primrose space, the first evening star had lit her tender little lamp.

There was a moment's curious silence in the great room. Then, from David's hand the glass fell, breaking on the mahogany; and the ruby wine was spilled in a great splash and ran stealthily, looking like blood. And the host, the lord of Bindon, with head erect and eyes fixed upon visions that none could even guess at, turned and left them all—without a word.

Re-acting against the unusual sensation that had almost paralysed them, Bindon's guests raised a shout of protest, and Harcourt sprang angrily towards the closing door. But the parson again interposed.

"I pray you," he said, with a dignity that imposed obedience, "I pray you let Sir David depart. He has gone back to his tower, and there no one must disturb him. He leaves you to your own more congenial company."

Colonel Harcourt broke into a boisterous laugh as he sank back into his chair, and reached for the bottle.

"Pity for the good wine spilt—that's all," he cried. "But 'twas wasted anyhow upon such a dreamy lunatic!"

Unceremoniously he filled himself another brimmer, and reflecting a moment—

“Now to my Lady Lochore!” said he at length slowly, “and to the wish of her heart!”

Doctor Tutterville looked at him askance. Then, after a moment, he too rose, and with an old-fashioned bow all round, left the room.

# BOOK III — CHAPTER VI THE LUST OF RENUNCIATION

CHAPTER VI THE LUST OF RENUNCIATION

O purblind race of miserable men, How many among us at this very hour Do forge a life-long trouble for ourselves By taking true for false or false for true! —TENNYSON (*Geraint and Enid*).

Ellinor went straight from the dining-room to seek her father in his peaceful retreat. Courage failed her to face the company any longer that night; she had, moreover, a longing to be with one who at least would not misunderstand her.

But, on the very threshold, her heart sank. It hardly needed Barnaby's warning clutch at her gown from where he sat like a statue of watchfulness, just inside the door, his shake of the head and mysterious finger on lip to show her that her coming was inopportune. The very atmosphere of the room forbade interruption. The air seemed full of floating thoughts, of whispering voices and stealthy vapours; of these singular aromas that to her were like the letters of a strange language which she had hardly yet learned to spell. Up to the vaulted roof the whole space was humming with mysterious activity; a thousand energies were in being around some secret work. And there, master-brain and centre power, her father, seated at his table, like a mimic creator evolving a world of his own out of the forces of his chaos!

She came forward a step or two. His underlip was moving rapidly; and broken, unintelligible words dropped from time to time among the whispering vapour-voices all about him, like stones into a singing fountain. Now he lifted his blue eyes, stared straight at her—and saw her not!

Once or twice before she had known him in this state of mental isolation; she was aware that his brain was wound up to an extraordinary pitch, and that to interfere with its operations or endeavour now to bring its thoughts into another current would be at once useless to herself and cruel to him.

Alas! He had been at his mysterious drugs again—those unknown powers that were beginning to fill her with secret terrors. She had more than once implored him to deal no more with them; but she might as well have implored a Napoleon to desist from planning conquest as the old chemist from experimenting upon himself or others.

She turned, and looked questioningly at Barnaby, who, by some strange dog-like intuition, never failed to remain within sight of his master at such moments. And the lad's expressive pantomime convinced her that her surmises were right. With a new anxiety added to her burden, she withdrew.

As she stood a moment outside the door, in deep despondency, she heard footfalls coming rapidly down the long passage which led from the tower-wing to the main body of the house. Her heart leaped: her heart would always echo to the sound of that step, as an untouched lute will answer to the call of its own harmony. It was David!

His brow uplifted, his gaze fixed, he came swiftly out of the shadow into the little circle of light; passed her so closely as nearly to brush her with his sleeve and crossed into the darkness again. And she heard the beat of his foot on the tower stairs in the distance, mount, mount, and die away. As little as her father, had he been aware of her presence!

She pressed her hands against her breast; and the taste of the tears she would not shed lay bitter on her tongue, the grip of the sob she would not utter left strangling pain in her throat. Poor all-human thing, with all her

human passions, human longings, human weakness, what was she to do between these two visionaries!

Then, in the natural revolt of youth repressed, she came to a sudden resolution. Her father was old; and, besides, he had drugged himself to-night till nothing lived in him but the mind. But David was young, young like herself! What was to hinder from following him again to his altitude; from calling upon him, by all the blood of her beating heart to the blood of his own, to come back from that spirit-world where she could not stand beside him—back to her level, where only a little while ago he had found a green and flowering resting-place? Then she would let him look into her soul. Then, with a tender hand, she would take that mask from his face. Then the hideous incomprehensible shadow that had come between them would fly before the light of truth, and (even to herself she could hardly formulate the sweetness of that hope into words) before the revelation of Love!

She caught up her heavy satin train and her gossamer muslins and ran, as if flying from her own hesitation, up the great stone stairs without a pause to listen to the beating of her heart, across the threshold of that room where, upon that first evening of tender memory, she had tripped and been caught against his breast.

He was not in the observatory. She sought the platform. She had known that she would find him there: and there indeed he stood, even as pictured in her mind, with folded arms and looking up at the sky. She looked up also, and was jealously glad, in her woman’s heart, that, so radiant was the summer moon to-night, those shining rivals of hers were but few and faint to the eye.

She laid her hand upon his arm; he turned, without a word, stared a second:

“Ellinor!”

She had meant to call him back to earth, but not like this! Here was again the incomprehensible look that had rested upon her at dinner, but with an added fierceness of anger so foreign to all she had known of him that she felt as if it slashed her.

“Oh, what has happened? David, what have I done?”

She clasped and wrung her hands. On her heat of pleading his answer fell like ice.

“Done?” he echoed, with that pale smile that seemed to mock at itself; “done, my fair cousin? Nothing in truth that anyone—I least of all—could find fault with. It would be as wise to chide the winds for shifting from north to south as to hold a woman responsible for her own nature.”

His light tones was in startling contrast with the flame of his eye. All unaware of any incident of the day that could have afforded ground for this change, she found as yet no clue in his words to guide her.

“David, David—what is it?” she cried again.

In the anguish of her desire to break down the barrier between them, to get close to his soul again, she stepped towards him, hardly noticing that he drew back from her until he was brought up by the parapet of the platform. When he could retreat no further, he threw out his hand with a forbidding gesture.

She stood obedient but bewildered, as a child that is threatened though it knows not why. The winds of the summer night played with the tendrils of her hair and softly blew the fair white fabric of her gown closer against her, while the tide of moon rays, pouring over her bare shoulders and arms, glorifying the smooth skin with a radiant gleam as of mother-of-pearl, flashed back in scintillations from the burnished embroideries of her robes; so that, with the heaving of her breast and the

tremor which shook her whole frame, she seemed to be enveloped with running silver fires.

Something—a passion, a mad desire—flickered into the man's face, as if, for an instant, a hidden fire had leapt up. The next instant this was succeeded by the former cruel gaze of contempt and anger, the more intense because so icily controlled. Once more measuring her from head to foot, he murmured, with an extraordinary bitterness of accent:

"Are all women either fools or wantons?"

One moment indeed she swayed as if she would have fallen; but instantly she recovered herself, and, with a movement, full of pride and dignity, stooped to gather the folds of her heavy train into her hands and fling them across those shoulders and arms she had so innocently left bare to walk in beauty before him. That the man she loved could have looked, could have spoken such insult, oh, no hand could ever draw the blade from out her heart! There would it remain and rust till she died. Her cheeks—nothing but death indeed would ever cool them again, she thought. And no waters, no snow, no fire would cleanse her white garments from the mud he had just cast at them.

She turned upon him, her arms folded under the swathes of satin.

They were no longer master of the place and voluntary servant; no longer rich lord of the land and recipient of his bounty; no longer the protector and the protected—no longer even the secretly beloved and the loving—they were man and woman upon the equality in which Nature had placed them in their young life. Man and woman, alone in the night, under the great open sky, the wide star-pointed heaven, high-uplifted above the land, far apart from any living creature, unrestrained by any convention, any extraneous touch; face to face, so utterly man and woman alone on this high peak of passion, that it almost seemed as if their bodily envelope must fall away also and leave naked soul to naked

soul. And yet, such lonely things has God made us in spirit, He who nevertheless said: “It is not good for man to be alone,” that when two souls meet in conflict and there is no tender hand touch, no meeting of lip to lip to draw the two together without words (we are always so betrayed by the treachery of word!) the difference in each soul is so essential that it seems as if nothing could ever bring them into union again. And there are battles in life which the soul traverses as utterly single as that final battle of all which each one of us is doomed to fight alone.

“David!” cried Ellinor, “explain!”

It was a command, enforced by eye and tone. So had Ellinor never looked before upon David; so had her voice never rung in his ear.

“Explain!” he echoed. “Of what value can the opinions of this poor fool among men, this recluse, this dreamer be to you, what consequences can you attach to them? Go back to the gay circle to which your nature belongs! There is your centre. Have I not seen it this month? Did I not see it to-day—to-night? What have we really in common, you and I?”

A glimmer of comprehension began to dawn upon Ellinor’s mind. But, sweetly stirring as it might have been at another moment to know David jealous, his mistrust came too closely upon his offence to avail. It was but added fuel to her wrath.

“How unjust!” she cried. “How ungenerous, how untrue!”

His haggard eye rested upon her with a sudden doubt of himself. Yet it was but as the pause before the widening rent in the breach—the pressure of the pent-up feelings on their unnatural height was too much now for the already weakened defences. The torrents were loose! He began, in hoarse, rapid, whispering voice:

“Oh, how you must laugh—you women that make us dance like puppets as you hold the strings!”

Then, suddenly, as with a crash and almost a cry, came the first leap of the flood.

“Why do you seek me? Could you not be content to have brought into my peace—God knows how hardly won!—this disturbance, this trouble, this disillusion? Have you not shown me once again that no woman, however kind, can be true; however fair but must be false; however straight-limbed, but must be tortuous of mind; however sweet to draw a man to her but must be black at heart! Is not that enough? I had gone back to my stars, back to all they mean to me; they had called me from among that ignoble crew where you—oh, incredible! seem to have found yourself so well! I had gone back to them, to their serenity, to their high communion.... Why did you call me down? Take your false troubling beauty from this my own peace ground!”

“But David! But, dear cousin, what insanity is this?”

“No,” he cried, with outflung hands beating back the sudden tender relaxation in her voice, the loosening movement of her folded arms under their mantle. “No,” he repeated loudly and harshly. “Once deceived where I most loved! Again deceived where I most trusted! Deceived again where nature, common blood, and family honour, should have most bound to faithfulness—it is enough! I have done with life. I will never again risk my hard-won peace of mind—life’s most precious possession—upon the frail stake of another’s loyalty. I have no friend, I have no sister. Ellinor, I will love no woman!”

His loud voice suddenly sank; and towards the last sentences, with a falling of her high spirit of anger, she saw him resume the old unnatural look, the old passionless tone of detachment and renunciation. The phrase with which he concluded rang in her ears more like a knell of all her secret hopes than the conventional offence.

“Oh,” said she, and the clear sweet note was shot through with a tremor of pain, “neither friend nor kin nor love? It is a hard sentence, David! Is it not as bad to mistrust truth as to break troth?”

But though her words were gentle she felt herself more aloof as she spoke than at any moment of their interview. Their two souls were drawing away from each other in the storm as the same wind and the same waves may part consorting vessels.

She moved, as to leave him, when he arrested her.

“You know the story of my life,” said he. “Stay, Ellinor, the night is mild.”

He put out his hand; but hesitated, and did not touch her. The frenzy of passion had left him, with that sudden change of mood that marks the fevered brain. She sat down on the parapet without a word. The night was mild, as he had said; yet, even under her improvised mantle she was cold—cold to the soul.

Now he had sealed the vial of her love. And, unless his hand knew the cunning of it and could break it open again, sealed it must remain till death. Had he but looked upon her first as now, but spoken as now, how different she might have made it! But even with his eyes upon her once more kind, and his voice in her ear once more gentle; with his hand trembling upon the stone of the bench, but a tiny span from hers; with the atmosphere of his presence enfolding her, she felt that they were still drifting apart further and further across the waste of waters.

“What have I said to you to-night?” he asked, and drew his hand across his brow. “Forgive me, you have always been very good to me. I owe you a great deal.”

She smiled with a welling bitterness.

“If you speak of owing,” she said, “I owe you the very bread I eat.” “And never felt it till to-night,” she added in her heart, but could not speak those words aloud because, in spite of everything, she loved him with that woman’s love that is kept tender by the mother instinct.—She could not hurt him who had hurt her so much.

His troubled gaze on her widened and then became abstracted.

“I have become a creature of the night,” said he, almost as if to himself. “For, by the light of day I cast such shadows as I go, that nothing, I think, could prosper near me. Always I have paid such toll for every good that it had been better I had never known it. The old curse is still upon me. Even for the comfort of your smile, Ellinor, I have had to pay.”

She drew a breath as if she would speak, but closed her lips proudly again. She could not plead for his happiness, for now that meant pleading for herself.

“Let me tell you,” said he once more, “what life has done to me.”

“I am listening,” she replied coldly, after a pause.

“Thank you—you are always patient with me. It is the last time that I shall ever bring a human being into my confidence, but I think you have a right to know, Ellinor, why I have been so moved to-day; to know how it is that events have once more shown me my own unfitness to mix with my fellow-creatures.”

He paused a second, then went on, resentment once more threatening in his voice like distant thunder.

“I cannot do with the meanness, the small duplicities, the little treacheries. Oh, God, duplicity is never small, and to me there is no little treachery. Ellinor, let but the tiniest rift be sprung in the crystal, and its note can never ring pure again. Oh, Ellinor, had you forgotten that?”

He stared at her with a new passion of reproach. But she sat, marble-still, with downcast lids: a cold white thing in the moonlight. And that passion of his that might just then have broken into tenderness, like a wave upon a gentle beach, recoiled upon itself as it met the barrier of her high hard pride.

He rose, thrust his nervous hands through his hair, pulling the heavy locks back from his brow. Then he began to speak very rapidly; sometimes turning towards her, as if his emotion must find an object; sometimes in lower tones, as if communing with himself; sometimes again throwing his words, as it were, into space. And thus he made his indictment against the mysterious powers that had ruled his fate.

# BOOK III — CHAPTER VII SHADOWS OF THE HEART OF YOUTH

CHAPTER VII SHADOWS OF THE HEART OF YOUTH

Be mine a philosopher's life in the quiet woodland ways, Where, if I cannot be gay, let a passionless peace be my lot. Far off from the clamour of liars, ... And most of all would I flee from the cruel madness of love, The poison of honey-flowers, and all the measureless ills!
—TENNYSON (*Maud*).

The moon, fulfilling its lower summer circuit, had moved already a considerable span upon the wondrous measure that, to the watcher, seems imperceptibly slow, and yet, like the passing of the hour, asserts itself with such irrevocable swiftness. The night had deepened from pale sapphire to dark amethyst. Below, all around, the great woods at Bindon, silver-crested southwards, whispered; and the light airs that stirred them gathered sweets from the rose-gardens and spices from the Herbary before reaching the two on their tower. These airs, Ellinor thought, must pass on their way again, heavy with the sighs of her heart!

"On such a night," what might not have been this meeting! With life all before them yet, what perversity was it to spend this silvery hour in the story of old and ugly wrongs; when God had made a heaven so fair, an earth so scented and a woman's heart so true, to see all with distorted vision and consort with the remembrance of injury until the voice of no better comrade could make itself heard!

He told her with how high a heart he had set forth on life; and indeed she well remembered his gallant figure in the pride of youth, his lofty

idealism and his fine intolerant scorn. She remembered, too, the witty mocking countenance, the cold green eye, the dark, auburn head of the Master of Lochore.—Lochore! Ellinor had instinctively dreaded and hated him. But with David he had taken the lead in everything; the relentless strength of the elder man's nature had transformed him into a kind of hero for the younger, at a time when student-brains are peopled with ideals of the highest pitch in all things, be it love or sport, war or friendship. David's reflective temperament was fascinated by a spirit of essential joyousness and fierceness.—In but a few words David touched on his past romantic affection for this Cosmo Lochore. It was with a sneer, as if the ghost of his own green youth had risen up before him and he could have withered it for his contemptible folly.

"Then," he went on, "came the long-promised month on the moors, at the edge of the Lochore Forest. Cosmo, in his kilt, at early dawn ... to see his crest of hair and his eagle feather flame in the first shaft of light! I don't suppose that any feelings can ever be quite so pure, so strong, so ideal, as this sort of boy adoration for the man. Ideal!" repeated David, and struck with his buckled shoe against a fernlet that had found a home for itself between two stones of the tower flooring and cast a little shadow in the moonlight.

Ellinor saw how he set his foot upon it, and thought the action symbolic.

"Ideal!" cried he, gibing at himself. "That is my curse, you see, that I cannot even now, accept life as it is! Fie! How ugly is all reality to me! What is in the doom of corruption that we carry in the flesh compared to the doom of corruption in the spirit? No! Rather this stone at my feet and the stars above my head!" He lifted, as he spoke, his face towards the sky; but it caught now no reflection of serenity, only light upon its own trouble. "I was an idealiser in friendship—how much more when it came to love!"

Impassively as she held herself, she could not control a slight start, a quick look at him. He was gazing beyond her, as if out there, in the night, the phantom of his first lost love had arisen before him. And when he went on speaking after a pause, it was as if he were addressing not Ellinor, but her—the Unknown—who had brought short joy and lasting sorrow into his life. Oh! Ellinor had been a fool not to have known how deep it had gone with him, since, after all these long years his every word, every action, bore witness to it! And yet, as she now looked at his face, she told herself she had not known it.

“A little creature—a kind of sprite, as light as a little brown bird, as lissom, as hardy as a heather blossom!”

Thus, from the unknown past, Ellinor’s rival rose before her: to be light, to be little, to be swift and lissom and brown—that was the way into his heart!... In every inch of her own splendid frame the listening woman felt great and massive, marble-white and still.

He paused. His mind was miles and years away. She caught her breath with a sigh that sounded so loud in her own ears that she tried to cover it with a laugh. Quickly the man wheeled round upon her.

“There is humour in my tale, is there not?” cried he, and his look and tone cut like the lash of a whip. “But give me your patience—the cream of the humour has yet to come!”

“Oh, David,” cried she in anger. “If I am not light of body, neither am I light of mind!”

If one like Colonel Harcourt, who understood the ways of women, had heard this cry, how knowing would have been his smile! What could David see of the heart laid bare? He looked upon her face and marked it scornful. The anger in her voice had struck him, but the wail of it had passed him by.

“Do I accuse you women?” he exclaimed. “Why should I! Have you not been made to match us men? The night that Lochore and I lost our way upon the moor and found refuge under the roof where she dwelt was the beginning of my instruction in life! Ah, God! The old story—I fell in love as I had fallen in friendship. It had been sweet to me to look up and feel myself protected by one like Lochore, stronger and better, as I thought, than myself. I thought it was ineffably sweet to find something so much weaker, so much smaller than I; something I could protect, something that looked up to me; brown eyes that seemed as true as they were deep—and scarlet lips that could kiss with such innocently ardent kisses....”

A fresh wave of anger swept through Ellinor’s veins. There came to her an almost overpowering impulse to spring to her feet, throw away her cloak and stand forth in her scorn, in her pride of life, in her wholesome humanity. Those unknown lips, those scarlet lips ... disowned now as they were, had still power to sting her. But she sat immovable, and let jealousy and love work their torture.

“You must think me mad,” cried David, with another abrupt change, “to inflict the old story upon you, the trite old story all the world knows. You know, Ellinor, you know.” He now addressed her with a personal, almost violent, directness. The matter seemed once more to lie between him and her alone. “I loved her, and she said she loved me. I was to make her my wife—my wife! Lochore mocked first, then stormed. We had our first quarrel; he swore he would prevent this madness. I was strong against him with a new strength—the strength of love against friendship.... Friendship! I forgave him, because I thought I must forgive such friendship! I left her. She wrote tender letters. I was to claim her in a few weeks. Suddenly I got a longing for her that could not be denied: a poet’s longing—the poet that lies in the heart of every lad of twenty! And then, do you need to be told how there was murder done upon that poet, murder upon the dreamer! upon his trust and his faith, upon his every

hold on life? Had it been but on his wretched flesh! But that they let live!"

He now bent over her, a bitter laugh upon his lips.

"There was a certain walk, Ellinor, sacred to our love. All those weeks I had dreamed of it, of the primrose sky and the meeting of our lips—in my ideal way!" He laughed aloud. "I ran to it straight. I had not gone two steps when I heard there on that consecrated spot, a laugh. The sound of her laughter so much more joyous than ever she had laughed for me—the sound of her voice, high and bright. And mingling with it, in familiar jests and tenderness the sound of a man's voice——" He stopped, and fixed her; then, once more drawing back, laughed again: "I had thought it was consecrated ground, you see!"

His ironic fury, as yet contained, was so intently pointed at herself that it could not but be revealing. The reproach of betrayal, then, was not to the little brown thing of the moor, but to her—to the great white woman!

Could it be possible? What insanity! And yet what sweetness! He had known, then, of that infraction in their own Herb-Garden this morning! Jealousy! There is no jealousy without love ... oh, then, she could forgive him all!

She rose, drawing a deep, joyous breath, and answered the indictment as she had taken it to herself.

"And what of it, David?" said she. Trembling upon her lips was almost that surrender which it is a woman's pride never to offer. "What of it?" And she would have added—"A woman cannot always be guardian of the outer world, however consecrated she may hold certain gardens. But so long as her heart remains inviolate, so long as that remains consecrate, what does anything else matter?" But he had quickly caught up her spoken word with a fresh outburst of frenzy.

“What of it?” he echoed. “You may well ask the question. Is it not a thing that happens every day? You are right, the man who would live in the world must close his ears to what is not meant for them; as he must shut his eyes, no matter how flagrant the treachery, that is spread out before him. And then, no doubt, he may find the world a vastly pleasant place. That is the proper doctrine. Oh, and ’tis the natural one, for we are all made cowards? I myself, when I heard, I ran from the sound. I threw myself upon the moor that evening. I thrust my fingers into my ears. I reasoned with myself against what I knew was the truth—that is what people call reason. And I said what you have said: What of it!”

There was a moment’s silence. Then his voice rang out once more:

“But I could not!” He struck his breast. “I could not. There is something here even now in this dead heart of mine that must live in me as long as the spirit is in me. The truth, the truth! I cannot lie to myself, I cannot believe in another’s lies—I had heard, I must see. I rose from the ground, it was drenched with dew. It was night. Something led me, angel or demon. There was fire-light leaping up against the window. I looked in—I saw. Oh, you woman, turn away your false, compassionate eyes, for one thing I have sworn that I will never look on a woman’s treachery again!”

“David,” cried Ellinor again, “remember that I am of your blood!”

“Aye, of my blood. The mockery of fate is complete: betrayed by friendship, betrayed by love, betrayed by my own blood——!”

“David!”

“Yes—Maud, my sister, that is my own blood, is it not? Maud laughed, oh, she laughed! She came and sat by the side of my bed, the wound that Lochore’s bullet had made was yet green in my lung—for the memory of our old friendship he could not even do me the mercy to shoot straight—and she, my own sister ... my blood! She was to marry the man

whose hand was red and whose soul was black, the man who had openly flaunted about Town, as the latest Corinthian, the girl that was to have been his friend's bride, and boasted that he had done me what he called the best service one man could do another. 'Why, fool, you owe him eternal gratitude,' said Maud. It was a huge joke!"

Terrified, Ellinor stood looking at him. If her pride had allowed her to reason with him earlier, perhaps it might have availed. Now she felt that any words of hers would be worse than useless. As well try to reason away ague or delirium.

"My friend, my love, my kin, you see!" he cried. "History repeats itself. You, you," he came close to her with a frenzied gesture as if to overwhelm her with reproach, "you, my kin, you who came into my solitude as my friend, you whom some blind madness has kept whispering to me was to be my love, you would combine in your single person the three traitors that stabbed my youth!"

She never knew if she had screamed, or if it was only the cry of her heart that suddenly rang in her ears. But she seized and clung to his descending hand as it would have waved her from him for ever.

"Ah, no, David, no!" she repeated, the denegation in a voice as frenzied as his own. And suddenly her ice of pride melted and the tears came streaming from her eyes. At the sight the man seemed to come back in some way to his senses. The cold hand she held became more human warm.

"Tears?" he said in an altered voice. "Have I caused you tears? Ah, don't cry, Ellinor! I must not blame you; it is only that the world is not made for me, nor I for the world. Forgive me and forget. You are what you are. I am what I am." He drew his hand from hers, turned his glance away. "To-night, as you sat, so resplendent, so pleased with the flattery and the admiration of these ... these creatures; so decked out, so different, the

scales fell away from my eyes. I saw the new course of self-deception I had entered upon; and it was very bitter. I have had no sleep this month. The past has been brought back upon me. I knew that it would be so—and dreaded it. Forgive me, Ellinor!”

He took her hand and led her, as he spoke, back into the observatory and towards the stairs. She felt she was being dismissed from her high place in his life.

When they reached the tower stair he said again: “Forgive me, forget.”

And as he spoke he dropped her hand. And she ran from him into the shelter of the darkness.

She wept through the night. But, heavy as was the darkness about her soul, in it shone one star at least. Jealous! He was jealous ... and without love there is no jealousy.

# BOOK III — CHAPTER VIII THE HERB EUPHROSINE

CHAPTER VIII THE HERB EUPHROSINE

Had’st thou but shook thy head or made a pause When I spake darkly ... Or turned an eye of doubt upon my face As bid me tell my tale in express words.... —SHAKESPEARE (*King John*).

Before her mirror the next morning Lady Lochore sat wrapt in sullen thoughts, thoughts of impotent anger, of failure, punctuated now and again by glances at her own ravaged countenance.

She had dwelt in Bindon well-nigh her allotted month, and she had accomplished nothing—unless an increase of David’s eccentricity and a marked accentuation of his antipathy towards herself could be reckoned a gain! The sands were running low. But it was not the span of the time that remained hers at Bindon (for she had no intention of leaving of her own accord and hardly believed the dreamer would find the energy to expel her, if, indeed, he were even aware of the consummation of time)—it was the span of her own life.

The sands were running very low. Meanwhile she had not conciliated David, nor had she ousted Ellinor. She had not even compromised her. Herrick was sighing *pour le bon motif* (young fool!) and in vain. Harcourt *roué* and duellist, “he who ought to have rid me,” thought she, raging, “of one or the other in a week,” had made no more progress than might old Villars himself. “Lochore did his business better!” she said half-aloud, and broke into a solitary laugh of inexpressible bitterness.

There came a tap at the door and Margery entered. Lady Lochore wheeled round, but it was idle to try and read any tidings upon the housekeeper's impassive face.

"Well," cried she, imperiously waving away the usual morning inquiries. "Well, speak, woman! Have you something to tell me at last?"

"Indeed, my lady, very little. Everything is much as usual. I am sorry to see your ladyship looking so ill. There do seem to be sickness about the house this morning, to be sure! Master Rickart indeed took to drugging himself last night—though that's nothing new—and Barnaby sat up with him and lies in a dead sleep on the mat this minute outside the laboratory door just like a dog."

"Pshaw! Go on."

"Sir David, he was not himself yesterday, so Mr. Giles tells me; and a bad night he had too. Eh! He paced that platform, my lady, right through from midnight to dawn. Not a wink of sleep did I have either with hearing through the window the sound of his steps and knowing him so tormented, poor gentleman! That was after Mrs. Marvel had left him!"

Lady Lochore struck the table with her beringed hand and started to her feet.

"Mrs. Marvel!"

Margery began to pleat a corner of her apron.

"Yes, my lady. She was up with him there on the tower till nigh midnight."

"On the tower!"

"Oh, yes, my lady. Not that that's anything new either. She used to be half the night with him sometimes. But that was before your ladyship came. She stopped going this last month. But last night—eh, my lady,

they did talk! I could hear the sound of their voices—she has great power with Sir David—has Mrs. Marvel."

Lady Lochore sat down again. Her fingers closed on the muslin of the dressing-table. Helplessly and hopelessly her haggard eyes looked forth into a black prospective. Oh, she had failed—failed!

"'Tis indeed a sad day for Bindon," said Margery after a pause, as if in answer to Lady Lochore. "No wonder your ladyship is anxious. There are times when I do think we'll have some dreadful catastrophe here. If it's nothing worse there'll be an accident with them drugs, as sure as fate. Master Rickart will be poisoning some of the poor folk again, or himself, maybe, or, indeed, it might be Mrs. Marvel, she that's always in with him."

Lady Lochore started ever so slightly and turned round sharply. Never had Margery looked more benevolent, more virtuous.

"Yes, that's what I do be saying to myself," pursued the housekeeper. "Somebody will be found dead, and nobody to fix the blame on, with the way things are going on." (The pupils of Lady Lochore's eyes narrowed like a hawk's.) "And when I see Mrs. Marvel going about, so young and fresh and strong, and sure of herself:—'Maybe it will be you,' thinks I."

"Oh, get away with you!" cried Lady Lochore, and buried her head on her hands with a frenzied gesture.

"Shall we go and look through the bars into the little paradise of poisons?"

When Colonel Harcourt had suddenly made this suggestion to his friends, as they lay, in somewhat discontented mood, under the shade of the spreading cedar tree this oppressive summer day, he had cast a meaning glance towards Lady Lochore and she had risen with alacrity.

“Excellent!” she cried, when at the forbidden gate Harcourt produced the key with a flourish.

She knew of David’s difference with the colonel on the previous day; and though it had sunk into insignificance before the news of Ellinor’s return to the tower, she was now as the drowning creature that clutches at straws-Colonel Harcourt was a noted shot. And she clapped her hands when the gate rolled back on its hinges. She had no need to be told that the dangerous Mrs. Marvel was busy among the herbs within.

Herrick, moodily striding beside the Dishonourable Caroline, gave but the most perfunctory ear to a discourse upon the inductions to be drawn from a partner’s first play of trumps—with especial reference to certain crimes of his own committed the previous night. He started as he saw Harcourt’s action.

“No—no!” he exclaimed. “I understand that this would be an indiscretion.”

“You will perhaps allow me,” said Harcourt blandly, “to make use of a key delivered over by no less a person than our host himself.”

“Mr. Herrick thinks it more discreet to climb over the wall!” suggested Priscilla. She had a happy faculty for being spiteful with a rosebud look of innocence.

“What, Luke!” cried Lady Lochore, seizing the young man by the arm and dragging him towards the entrance, “so cast down! Was the fair widow then hard of approach to-day? Pluck up heart, lad. What! You a poet, you a little nephew of the original Herrick, and not know that when a woman assumes the defensive she is just considering the question of surrender? Why, what a lady this is! Eh, Priscilla, poor you and poor me must hide our diminished heads!”

She broke into a jeering laugh as the girl crimsoned and tossed her chin; her great hollow eyes danced, brighter even that those of the lover in his renewed confidence; her cheeks flamed a deeper scarlet than those of the mortified girl herself. She sketched a favorite gavotte step or two, as she gave her hand with a flourish to Colonel Harcourt that he might lead her across the forbidden threshold.

Ellinor, seated on the stone bench, with her empty basket before her, staring with unseeing eyes at the little bluish stars that spread all over the bed where flourished the herb Euphrosine, was suddenly disturbed from her melancholy musing.

These loud voices, this trivial laughter! By what freak of irresponsible folly were these few roods of ground (which now she had as much interest to keep inviolate, as ever Vestal virgin to keep her flame alive) to be again invaded? The intruders were actually in the garden: and no spot of it was hidden from David's tower! She had just been chiding herself for her thoughtlessness of the previous day in permitting for a moment Herrick's uninvited presence; for her light-mindedness in having found transient amusement in his company. Had she now failed again in faithfulness, was it possible that she could have omitted to lock the gate behind her? She hurriedly felt for her key; it hung on the ribbon of her apron. Then she rose upon an impulse: David had made her guardian here, she would keep the trust.

With head held high and with determined step, she went to meet them. She lifted her voice boldly as she came within speaking distance.

"Lady Lochore, if you found the gate open, this garden is none the less forbidden to visitors, by your brother's wish. I must beg you all to leave it!"

Lady Lochore, her white teeth gleaming between her parted lips, her deep eyes insolently fixed upon her cousin's face, listened without a word. Then:

"*Calmez-vous, ma chère*," said she, "the gate was opened for us."

"Chide me!" Colonel Harcourt thrust his handsome presence to the front. "It would be sweet to be chidden by those rosy lips. The next best thing, I declare, to being——" He paused, let his eye finish the phrase with bold suggestion, and then concluded humourously, with an almost farcical hesitation and change of tone: "praised by them!"

There was a new freedom in his manner and Ellinor was prompt to feel it. She remembered as with a dim sense of nightmare those burning glances, unnoticed then, which had fixed her last night. What had she done to forfeit the respect even of this hitherto courteous and kindly gentleman? She stepped back as he approached and looked at him icily.

"Whether you opened the gate or found it opened, I must repeat, Colonel Harcourt, that your presence here is a breach of courtesy—to your host and to me."

Smiling, Colonel Harcourt opened his mouth to speak. But Lady Lochore intervened.

"How well you know my brother's mind, Mrs. Marvel!" she jeered. "But you see, even men change their minds sometimes. Colonel Harcourt, show the lady with whose key you opened the gate."

"Sir David's own key," confirmed the colonel blandly, as he held it aloft. "We are not quite the trespassers you think."

"David gave it to you?" Her eyes were dark with trouble as she said the words, less as a question than as if she were setting forth her own grief. Harcourt did not answer for a moment. Then, slipping the key into his pocket with a laugh:

“Gave?” he cried. “Gave is hardly the word. He abandoned it to me. People change their minds, as my lady says. Sir David may once have wished to keep this curious spot sacred to himself——”

“And to Mistress Marvel, but now you may all eat the forbidden fruit!” cried Lady Lochore, with a glance first at the three men and then at Ellinor. “Sir David has at last found that it is not worth keeping to himself.”

Herrick, quick to perceive that Ellinor was being baited yet unable to gather the clue to the purpose which seemed to underlie her tormentor’s words, now came forward.

“But surely,” he urged, blushing ingenuously, “it is enough for us if Mrs. Marvel does not wish our presence.”

Almost before Lady Lochore’s hard laugh had time to ring out, Ellinor answered:

“Oh, no,” she said. The exceeding bitterness of her humiliation drew down the lips that tried to smile. “Pray, what can it be to me? I was only guardian. I am relieved of my trust.”

She made a sort of little curtsey, half-ironic. And then moved away from them.

But she was not destined to carry her bursting heart to solitude this morning.—Master Simon, his white hair fluttering, the tassel of his velvet cap swinging, the skirts of his dressing-gown flapping as he advanced with a high jerky step quite unlike his usual slow shuffling gait, emerged from the shade of the yew-tree, even as she stood on the threshold of the gate.

One glance at his wildly-lighted eye and the flush on his cheek bones, sufficed to convince Ellinor of the cause of this extraordinary infraction of his rule of life. He was still under the influence of the last night’s drug;

or, worse still perhaps, of some new one. He waved his arm at her and at the group beyond.

“Admit me among you, ladies!” he cried, in a high thin tone. “I will tell you all great news! Daughter, child, this hour strikes a new era in the world’s history! The herb Euphrosine has given me back my youth!”

And, to complete the fantastic scene, Belphegor, every hair bristling, tail erect, eyes aflame with green phosphorescence, sprang from the bushes and performed a wild saraband around his master, uttering uncouth little cries.

Master Simon broke into shrill laughter.

“Ask Belphegor if we have not found the secret of youth restored!”

# BOOK III — CHAPTER IX AN OMINOUS JINGLE

CHAPTER IX AN OMINOUS JINGLE

Within the infant rind of this weak flower Poison hath residence, and medicine power. —SHAKESPEARE (*Romeo and Juliet*).

The old man good-humouredly, but firmly, resisted his daughter's anxious endeavours to lead him back to his room. He entered the garden, established himself on the bench, and, waving a branch of the beloved herb to emphasise his words, embarked upon a profuse discourse upon its properties. The others gathered round him in curiosity and amusement.

Ellinor could not leave him a prey to the freakish humours of the company at such a moment. His brain seemed to work with an extraordinary clarity and vigour, his worn frame seemed to have regained an energy and elasticity it could not have known these twenty years. And the contrast between his aspect of æthereal age and the youthful exuberance of joy now written on his features struck her as alarming in the extreme.

Her anxiety was not lessened when Master Simon now wound up his first oration by proclaiming that, after various long hours of work, he had at last extracted so pure an essence of the *Euphrosine* that one drop had sufficed to produce this result upon himself.

"Then, surely, father," she cried, "you have prepared a dangerous drug! Out of its beneficence you must have drawn a deadly poison——"

Lady Lochore had seated herself on the bench on the other side of the old student. She evinced a great interest in his remarks; encouraged him by exclamation, laughter and question to further garrulity. At Ellinor's

words she lifted her head with a sudden quick movement, like that of a stag on the alert. And into her eyes flashed a look so eager, and so evil, that she herself, in consciousness of it, instantly dropped the lids over them. She felt Harcourt's glance upon her.

"Poison," said she, feigning to yawn. "Oh, fie! then I'll have none of your remedy."

Priscilla, idly turning the pages of the "Gerard" which Ellinor had left out of her hand on the sundial, stood silent, shooting glances by turns at Harcourt and Herrick. The former, standing with folded arms behind Ellinor, the latter, lying stretched on the hot soil at her feet, seemed too thoroughly content with their posts to be lured from them. But at Ellinor's exclamation, the little circle had been stirred.

"Poison?" echoed Master Simon in his turn. "Tush! Ellinor, I am ashamed of you! By this time you should know better. Is not every medicine, nay, every distilled spirit, poison in certain degrees? And how about Opium? How about Digitalis, Aconite and Laurel, Mercury and Antimony? Pooh! What need of names?"

"Even in love a poison lies!" murmured Herrick, and looked up languishingly at Ellinor's unseeing face.

"No doubt," said Harcourt, in a most indifferent voice, "so wise a philosopher as Master Simon always locks up his poisons!"

"Child," pursued the old man, "I tell you, this herb which was lost to the world, but which you yourself found again, planted and nurtured, is destined to be the greatest boon mankind has yet known! The older students had some hints of its powers, some glimmering of its uses. But it wanted the resources of modern methods of modern chemistry to develop them. I have now reduced its essence to the most convenient form. A drop, one drop a day—ah, ladies and gentlemen, farewell to all your miseries!"

“Is it not wonderful!” cried Lady Lochore. She clasped her hands and looked keenly at the old man; and he, anxious to improve the occasion upon so earnest a believer and so interesting a case for experiment, now gave her his undivided attention.

Ellinor, with a sigh of impatience, rose, and, taking up her basket, proceeded to her neglected work of plant gathering, here and there consulting a pencilled list that was pinned to the handle. Herrick was promptly at her side.

“What are you going to make of those?” he asked, plucking in his turn a leaf from every plant that her scissors had visited.

“A febrifuge for an old woman in the village. It is promised for to-night.”

“And if I do—I have half a mind to come into your den and let you give it to me yourself—what effect could one drop have on me?” Lady Lochore was saying. And the old man answered:

“It would arrest the disease that is ravaging your strength and at the same time stimulate your nerves; so that, waste ceasing, all the energies of your body would unite in building up strength and health again.”

“How truly delightful!”

“Your restlessness would vanish. This morbid mental condition, which is so apparent, would become replaced by a calm, cheerful, contented frame of mind—like mine!”

“My dear Sir! How my friends would bless you!”

“In the course of a few months——”

“Months? La! I can’t wait months. I’ll have five drops a day.”

“God forbid! That would defeat its own end. To stimulate is one thing, but to over-excite——”

“Would five drops over-excite me?”

“Indubitably. If one has already so potently invigorating an effect, five drops would produce a most undesirable condition of mental super-excitement—most undesirable!”

“Then ten drops?”

“Colonel Harcourt,” cried Priscilla pettishly, “pray come to my rescue: there’s a wasp on my book!”

The colonel obeyed the summons, but without any extraordinary alacrity; Lady Lochore’s conversation with Master Simon was unexpectedly interesting.

“Ten drops?” Master Simon was explaining. “Madness probably. More than ten, paralysis, no doubt. Twenty? Oh, twenty would be stillness for evermore—Death!”

Having duly murdered the wasp, Colonel Harcourt was chagrined to find that the new student of pharmacopœia seemed to have already had enough of her lesson. She had risen to her feet and was standing deeply reflective. Her great eyes were roaming from side to side, yet unseeing. Her lips were moving noiselessly. He went up to her. An unusual gravity was upon his smooth countenance. He bent to her ear:

“What are you saying to yourself?” he whispered.

She started, flashed round half in anger, half in mockery; then their glances met and her face grew hard.

“I was merely conning over to myself,” answered she, “our dear old necromancer’s last pregnant utterance; it sounds like a popular rhyme:

One drop gladness, Ten drops madness, Twice ten a living death After that no more breath.

Have I not put it into a useful jingle for you?" she cried, interpellating the old man.

But Master Simon, deeply absorbed in watching Belphegor, as the beast stretched and yawned and rolled restlessly in the sun, never turned his head. Colonel Harcourt laid a finger on her wrist, and drew her away from the others.

"What are you planning now?" he asked, in the same repressed undertone as before.

"Planning?" she echoed, and crossed his searching gaze with one of stormy defiance. "Oh, my dear confidant, do you not know all my inmost secrets? *Dieu*, how you stare! Two drops gladness, ten drops madness. Let me give you some of the stimulant—say three drops—'twould stir your sluggish wits. Do, I pray you, accompany me to the laboratory, and with these fair hands I will measure you a dose from the magic phial. Oh, how Master Simon will love me if I bring him a new patient! Believe me, it will do you a vast service, my dear sir, you have grown dull and slow of late—very slow."

Out of her laughing face her eyes looked fiercely. He walked away from her; paused, with his back upon them all, to ponder. Then he frowned, and after that shrugged his shoulders.

"What a fool you are, Antony Harcourt," said he to himself, "to have let yourself be mixed up with this woman's business! I vow you'll pack!"

Lady Lochore had returned to the bench and was again sitting beside Master Simon, and once more brooding. Tragedy was writ in large letters all over her wasted, death-stricken figure. Above all things the colonel hated tragedy. Violent emotions were so ill-bred, tiresome. What could not be accomplished with a gentlemanly ease, that, by the Lord, was not for him! A love intrigue, well and good. And if there were tears at the end of it, so long as they were not shed upon his waistcoat—and none knew

better how to avoid that—here was your man. But when it came to—"By Gad!" thought Colonel Harcourt, with fresh emphasis, "the place is getting too hot for me."

And back again he came to his resolution; this time fixed.

"I will take my leave of all this to-night. But, faith! I'll part friends with the pretty widow."

After her spasmodic fashion Lady Lochore now suddenly resumed her wild humours. She smiled as she saw how the two cavaliers were now again in close attendance upon Ellinor; smiled at the deserted Priscilla; and finally, at the sight of two figures approaching from the direction of the entrance, broke into open laughter.

David in the strange comradeship of Villars!

David, jealous and wrathful, coming to rescue his invaded garden, suspicious of Ellinor's faithlessness—a possible quarrel! For the mere mischief of it, it was enough to make Lady Lochore laugh. And laugh she did.

# BOOK III — CHAPTER X A VAGUE DESPERATE SCHEME

## CHAPTER X A VAGUE DESPERATE SCHEME

Now let it work: mischief thou art afoot! Take thou what course thou wilt. —SHAKESPEARE (*Julius Cæsar*).

“Ah, David,” cried Master Simon, in excited greeting, “you come very well to complete our pleasant party—you come well! ’Tis the red-letter day in the calendar of my life. See that flourishing growth?” He waved his spray in the direction of the parent bed. “It is bearing fruit, lad! Seed of health, for the future generation! My long life has borne its fruit at last! Euphrosine ... Gladsome Wort ... Etoile-de-Bon-Secours ... Star-of-Comfort indeed! Behold a more useful constellation than any of yours, aha! I can cry *Eureka*! I can sing *Nunc dimittis*. ’Tis the Elixir of Genius!”

Sir David threw a wondering glance at his old friend, but was arrested before he could speak in reply. Miss Priscilla put out her hand in shy greeting. (Sir David and she had never exchanged but a bow before; but it was quite evident that retiring people could not get on in this world.) David, taking off his wide-brimmed hat, bowed mechanically over the little hand, and Priscilla looked quickly up as he bent over her. But as she looked, she shrunk back. She could not have believed that any one should be so pale and yet be alive and walk abroad and smile. She flew to Herrick’s side and caught his arm upon the impulse of the moment.

“Why, Miss Pris?” said the young poet. If his eyes were not lover-like, they were kind; his cheek was ruddy-brown, his lip was red. Priscilla clung to the sturdy arm she had captured.

“It’s never you, my brother?” cried Lady Lochore. “What brings you among us frivolous humans at this unwonted hour? Have you come to turn us out of paradise with a flaming sword?”

Ellinor, who had been anxiously gazing at David, thrust herself forward in a manner quite unlike her usual reserve.

“David,” she cried, “you are ill!” She laid her hand a second upon his. “Father,” she went on, turning round appealingly, “do you not see? Cousin David is ill.” And as Master Simon took no heed, but rambled on in fresh rhapsodies, she and David remained a moment as if alone.

“They had your key, David,” she said, speaking rapidly, “and forced their way in. I have never opened the gate of our garden to a human being since you and I were here together.”

He turned to her, and seemed to bring, from a great distance, his mind to bear upon her words. Then his eyes softened, became almost tender as they rested upon her face. After a little pause, during which he was quite oblivious of the curious looks cast from all sides upon him, he answered in a low voice:

“Thank you. I think I understand now.”

Then he turned—bracing himself in mind and body—and swept the company with the gaze of the master and the host.

“I forgot my key in the gate, it seems, and you all took advantage of the circumstance—Oh, pray, not a word, Colonel Harcourt! Indeed, Mr. Herrick, do not misunderstand me. I should be infringing the most elementary tenets of hospitality did I wish to deny such honoured guests when it seems they had set their hearts on so trifling a pleasure. Pray remain in the garden, pray use it as much as you wish—to-day. I have no doubt,” he went on with a sarcastic smile, “that you will all be heartily sick of it before nightfall. Meanwhile, since to-morrow sees the end of

your visit to my house, I am the more glad to gratify you in this instance."

There was a slight pause. Harcourt exchanged a look with Herrick and shrugged his shoulders; then he turned his glance towards Lady Lochore. Her face was livid, but for the hectic patch on either cheek.

"A *congé*, as neatly given as ever I heard!" whispered Herrick to Priscilla, while his cheek reddened.

"Very courteous, very courteous indeed!" cried Villars in his cracked voice, making two or three quick bows in Sir David's direction.

"My sister," said David, taking up his unfinished thread of speech, in the same decided tone, "was good enough to promise me a month out of her gay existence. I should be indeed ungrateful if I did not appreciate the manner in which she has brought so much life and animation into our seclusion, and I must be deeply indebted to her for the well-chosen company she has collected for this purpose under my roof." Here he made a grave inclination in which his astonished guests were all included. "But all good things come to an end; and to-morrow will see Bindon deserted of its lively guests, see us resuming the former quiet tenor of our lives with what heart we may."

He smiled again as he concluded.

Herrick, in boyish huff, walked abruptly off with Priscilla still on his arm. Villars followed in their wake, anxious to discuss so extraordinary a situation. Lady Lochore wheeled round and caught Harcourt by the arm.

"Tony, will you submit to such treatment?" she whispered fiercely.

For a moment Harcourt looked at her, with a curious green gleam in his eye:—the affable *roué* was also "something of a tiger," as David's sister had not forgotten. But the next instant he shrugged his shoulders and detached himself from her grasp with some show of annoyance. Ellinor

stood beside her cousin, face uplifted, pride of him, joy for herself exulting within her. But David suddenly put his hands to his forehead:

“If I do not get some sleep at last,” he murmured with a distraught air, “I shall go mad!”

“Father,” she cried sharply once more alarmed. “Look to David, he is ill!”

Master Simon woke up this time like the hound to the sound of the horn, and came forward with quite a new expression of acuteness and gravity on his face.

“And, by my faith!” exclaimed Lady Lochore, in fury, “this passes endurance! With your leave, Mrs. Marvel, if David is unwell, he has his sister to see to him.”

She pushed past Master Simon, who, however, put her back with a decided hand.

“One minute, Madam, this good lad will be seen to by him who has done so these many years—and in much graver circumstances, as you may remember.”

Abashed, yet still raging, she stood back.

“A trifle of fever,” said the simpler, shooting scrutiny at his patient’s face from under his drawn bushy eyebrows. “Hot and cold, flame and shiver? Eh, eh. I can read you like a book. Never has my insight been clearer. We’ll make you a draught, we’ll have you a new man. Ellinor shall brew you an anodyne. Eh, what? Come now, you’ll have to drink it. What’s that?”

David was speaking, but not to Master Simon.

“I will drink it if she gives it to me,” he said dreamily. It was to Ellinor he turned.

“And perhaps a drop—eh, child?—just one drop of the Elixir!” continued the old man, ruminating and chuckling again.

“Not one,” said Ellinor to herself. “Vervaine and violet, and perhaps one poppy head.” “David,” she pursued aloud, “no hand but mine shall mix this cup.”

And, with a swift foot she departed.

“The Elixir?” exclaimed Lady Lochore, taking up Master Simon’s word; and seizing a fold of his gown pulled at it like a spoiled child to force his attention. “Don’t forget you have promised me first some of that marvellous remedy. Look at me! Don’t you think I want a new lease of life? The present one is pretty well run out anyhow.”

She tried to smile, but her lips only twitched convulsively. There was desperation in her eye. Master Simon, instantly bestowing upon her the concentrated, almost loving, attention which a willing patient never failed to arouse in him, noted these symptoms, those of a soul well nigh as mortally sick as the body; noted them with joyous confidence. The greater the need the greater the triumph. What a subject for the grand panacea!

“Ah, you’ll give me a little bottle. You’ll give me some, now, into my hands—now—dear cousin!”

“I will myself measure you what is required, myself watch!” replied Simon. “Then, after I——”

She broke in upon his complacent speech.

“Don’t you know that we are turned out to-morrow!” she screamed. “Have you not heard David dismissing his dying sister from her father’s door!”

But Sir David, slowly moving in Ellinor's wake, never even turned his head at this wild cry. Lady Lochore caught herself back with surprising strength of will.

"Supposing you were to take me to your mysterious room now—old Rickart?" she wheedled. "Since we have so little time, the sooner the better to begin this magic treatment. I've never been in that room of yours, you know, since I was a brat—I do want my little bottle!" she reiterated.

The simpler was flattered by her words to the choicest fibre of his soul. The mental intoxication had got hold of him once more. She was right, a thousand times right! She knew better than that lunatic brother of hers. The first maxim of all intelligent existence was to take the good that came, and without delay. Delay, delay! More lives lost, more discoveries lost, empires lost, souls lost by hesitation than by any other crime.

She hooked her arm in his gaily.

"To your cavern we will go!"

Half ways towards the house, Colonel Harcourt suddenly drew alongside with Sir David. They were separated from the rest of the company by the turn of the path. The guest spoke twice before he could awaken his host's attention to his proximity. But the second interpellation was so peremptory that David started from his fevered abstraction and came to a halt, with an angry look and very much alive to the occasion.

"Well, Colonel Harcourt?"

The colonel was, on the instant, his urbane self once more.

"Forgive my interrupting you in the midst of your lofty cogitations; but, as it is my purpose to leave your hospitable house to-day, and not to-morrow, I will even say farewell to my genial entertainer, and proffer my thanks for a hearty welcome and a no less hearty speeding."

“Farewell, then, sir,” said David coldly. “Yet one word more, before we part,” he added, with sternness: “If hosts have duties toward their guests, Colonel Harcourt—you have reminded me of it—do not yourself forget again that guests have a duty toward their hosts. That key, of which you unwarrantably——”

“A lesson, sir? By Heaven!——”

“May you take it so, Colonel Harcourt.”

The colonel’s face became purple, but Sir David was angry too: and the white heat is even more deadly than the red. The guardsman, actor in endless honourable encounters, had learned to know his match when he met him; and, as the beast passion within him cooled to merely human pitch, he was seized with a kind of grudging admiration. Here he could no longer sneer and contend. Nay, here, as a gentleman, he must show himself worthy of his antagonist.

Bowing his still crimson face with as good a grace as he could assume:

“Then, no farewell yet, Sir David; to our next meeting,” he said.

The lord of Bindon raised his hat and passed on whilst his guest remained standing.

# BOOK III — CHAPTER XI A PARLOUR OF PERFUME

## CHAPTER XI A PARLOUR OF PERFUME

O magic sleep! O comfortable bird That broodest o’er the troubled sea of the mind, Till it is hushed and smooth!... —KEATS (*Endymion*).

The atmosphere of Master Simon’s laboratory was much the same, winter or summer. No extreme of heat or cold could penetrate this crypt, deep set as it was in the foundations of the keep; and, though against the long narrow windows, cut into the wall on the level of the moat, one could see the slender spikes of reed and rushy grass perpetually trembling in the airs, there was but little direct sunshine. Sometimes, however, downward thrusts, like spears, when Sol was high; or again when he was about to sink a level shaft, rose-red in winter, amber glowing in summer, would come driving in through the vaulted spaces, high above Master Simon’s head and show to the eye that cared to notice, how dim and vapour-heavy was all the room below.

The two fires then came not amiss. Despite the flame on the open hearth and the glow of the little furnace, Lady Lochore, as she entered, shivered after the hot sunshine.

“How dark it is with you!” she cried. “And what strange odours! Ha! It smells of poison here!”

“To treat the unknown as unwholesome is the animal instinct,” said the chemist, didactically, with a glance of contempt. “How differently does it affect the intellectual being! Fortunately it is in man’s power to extract good or bad from everything. Listen! Every one of those little apparatus simmering over yonder is yielding up juices for healing. Did I choose,

child—there might indeed be death in those retorts; just as there is death in fire and water, in air and in sun. These things are our servants, and we use them. Poison! How you women prate of poison! Timorous souls!"

"I, prate of poison?" exclaimed Lady Lochore. "I, timorous! Where is my phial, sir? Oh, I'll show you if I am afraid!"

She advanced upon him swiftly through the half light to which her eyes had not yet become accustomed, and instantly belied her own words by a violent start and scream. Out of the recess where murmured the furnace fires, Barnaby illumined by the lurid glow, with elf locks hanging and face and hands blackened, suddenly emerged in his peculiar noiseless fashion; on his shoulder was Belphegor still all a-bristle and with phosphorescent eyes.

"Do you keep devils here, too?" she screeched.

The dumb boy made an inarticulate sound and stared at the lady. Who shall say the thoughts that revolved in that brain relentlessly shut off from communion with the rest of the world? In those beings who are deprived of certain senses the remaining wits seem often to become proportionately acute! Nobody could walk so softly, touch so gently as Barnaby; and nobody could see so swiftly, so deeply. He started back in his turn and glowered. This was the first time he had looked into the visitor's face; her hectic cheek, her roving eyes, her eager teeth glimmering between ever parted lips—they liked him not. Or, perhaps, who can say, it was the soul behind those eyes that liked him not.

Master Simon chuckled.

"Poisons and devils!... my good Herbs! My faithful Barnaby! A deaf and dumb lad, my dear, nothing more! But we shall have these nerves of yours in vastly different trim, even before the day is out. Come here to the table and sit you down. Nay, now, if you laugh like that, how can we discuss in reason, how can I trust you with this precious stuff?"

Lady Lochore made a violent effort to repress the nervous tremor that still shook her.

“When I’ve had my first dose,” she said, artfully, “I shall be so much better that you will trust me with anything.”

This betokened so excellent a spirit that Master Simon could not be expected to show further disapproval. How could he, indeed, feeling in his own veins a new ichor of life, in his own brain an increased lucidity, in his temper so grand a mood of confidence and decision? He had seated the lady in his own chair and was seeking in the press for the new essence, when Barnaby arrested his attention by a timid hand. The lad pointed significantly to the cat which he was now nursing against his breast. Master Simon glanced at the animal’s staring coat, its protruding eye, noted the quick breathing and touched the hot ear. Belphegor growled fiercely.

The old man’s countenance became clouded for a moment; a shade as of misgiving crept into his eye.

“Come, come cousin,” rose the complaining note of his new patient’s voice; and Master Simon waved Barnaby away with peremptory gesture.

The boy slunk back with his burden and the simpler lifted the precious phial from its shelf.

“Here,” said he, bearing it over to the table with infinite care, and admiring its orange colour against the light, “here is the Elixir.”

When Ellinor came down the steps into the laboratory, she found her father still holding forth in the highest good humour, and Lady Lochore listening with bent head in an attitude of profound attention. At the sound of her step he broke off with an excited laugh.

“Aha, Ellinor, the cure has begun! She’s better, she’s better already. Look at her. Ah, you doubted, you, my daughter, you who worked with

me side by side! Out on you, you of little faith! This is to be my best case. In a month's time you will see what you will see."

Lady Lochore had risen from her chair and, fixing Ellinor with unfathomable looks, in the same measure as she drew nearer drew slowly back herself.

"By the lord, to see her come, in her hateful youth and strength, in her pride—and I, I to have failed!" These were the words of the interior voice. With a convulsive movement she lifted her hand, pressed the little phial where it lay against the wasted bosom. And the pain of that pressure was, of a sudden, fierce joy. Failed? Not yet! Her glorious boy was not to go a beggar whilst such creatures as that rode!

Like a tingling fire the exultation of that single drop of magic cordial began to course through her. She had hated Ellinor before she knew her, with the instinctive hatred of the destined enemy. The instant she had set eyes upon the fresh face, the placid brow, the serious quiet eyes, this instinctive hatred had surged into a living passion that was like a wild beast ever ready to spring. And if now she were to slip the leash and let the leopard go, who could punish her, dying woman as she was? What evil would it bring upon her, were it ever known? Aye, who would ever be the wiser (as Margery said) in this house of craziness where people dabbled with unknown poisons at their own fantasy?

Thus the muttering voice within. Then it was hushed upon the silence of a resolution.

"Lady Lochore," said Ellinor, "I must warn you, that drug is not safe!"

"Be silent!" exclaimed Master Simon, angrily.

Lady Lochore did not answer, for she was seized with laughter.

"Dear father," insisted Ellinor. She had come round to the old man and had laid her hand caressingly upon his shoulder, "I have nothing but

mistrust for your new Elixir. You have taught me too much for me not to realise its danger. If you were not now under its influence yourself, I know you would see it too. Even a mere infusion of the leaves has so strange an effect, that I have ceased—forgive me, dear—to let the villagers have it."

The simpler threw off her touch in high displeasure.

"A woman all over!" he muttered. "Fool indeed that I was to think there could be an exception to the ineptitude of the sex! A pretty helpmate for a man of science! But I went myself to the village to-day. Aye!" the fanatic light once more shone under the white eyebrows. "There were many who needed it. Wait, Ellinor, wait! My discovery shall speak for itself—shall refute——"

"Good God!" cried Mrs. Marvel, aghast, and turned instinctively to Lady Lochore, "what will be the outcome of this?"

Lady Lochore laughed again.

"Mrs. Marvel," she gibed, "has developed all of a sudden a mighty dread of scientific investigation. Out upon such paltry spirit! She should take a lesson by my valour, should she not, most wise and excellent alchemist? And if a little mistake does occur now and again, 'tis but the more instructive, all in the interest of mankind. Now, Mistress Marvel, would not that console you?"

Still clasping her hand over the phial in her breast, Lady Lochore now moved towards the door—slowly, for the little voice within was beginning to speak again, and she had to listen as she went. There was a new jingle rustling in her brain:

"Ten drops madness Twenty stillness, And after that ... blackness!

It should be easy!... Yes, it should be easy ... in a dish of tea! What a round throat the hussy has!"

“Well, father,” said Ellinor’s clear voice, “I must see to David’s sleeping draught.”

Lady Lochore in the doorway started and turned round. All at once a light shone into her brain as if some invisible hand had turned the lens of a lantern upon it: David’s sleeping draught—David.... Of course! How clear the whole thing lay before her! She had been about to be clumsy, stupid, inartistic. But now.... Oh, truly this one drop of the old man’s Elixir had been a drop of genius.... “The secret of genius,” had the old man said! Ellinor—what of Ellinor! Merely a thing in the way; a stone to trip up the step of her son’s fate. Throw it aside, and who shall say how soon another might not cast the beloved lad to earth? Aye, and when she would not be there to help. David—it was David!... Who could reckon on the doings of such a madman as David now this wooing mood had been started?

Presently, with slow steps, she came down the room once more.

Ellinor, bending over her fragrant infusion, felt a shadowing presence and looked round, to find Lady Lochore at her shoulder. It was in the dim and vapoury corner behind the screen lit only by the glow of the charcoal. An impression of gleaming eyes and of teeth from which the lips were drawn back for one moment troubled her vaguely; but the next she was full of pity. “Poor creature! How ill she is, and how restless!” she thought.

“Is that the stuff?” inquired Lady Lochore, laughing aimlessly like a mischievous child. And Mrs. Marvel answered her gently, as if it had been indeed a child who questioned:

“Yes, does it not smell sweet? An old recipe, ‘The Good Woman’s Brew’; Vervaine, Red Lavender and Violet, Thyme, Camphire, and a sprig of Basil.”

She now placed the vessel on a low shelf close at hand, and began deftly lifting out the sodden herbs with a glass rod. Little jets of aromatic steam rose and circled about her. Lady Lochore followed her, and once again bent over her shoulder. Barnaby seated, cross-legged, in the darkest corner near the furnace and nursing humpy Belphegor, stared at the two women with all the might of his wistful eyes.

“What are you doing?” asked Lady Lochore.

“Surely you see: clearing these grosser leaves away before finally straining.”

“Oh, let me!”

Ellinor laid down the rod and looked at the speaker with mingled surprise and anxiety. “I hope in Heaven,” she was thinking, “that my father has given her no more than the one drop.”

“Do let me,” insisted Lady Lochore and laid a burning finger on the other’s cool hand.

“Oh, certainly if it pleases you. Meanwhile I will get the cup,” said Ellinor and turned away.

She had hardly had time to take down the chosen goblet from a cupboard, when there came a strange and sudden uproar from behind the screen.—A growl like that of a wild beast from Barnaby, a snarl from Belphegor, a wild shriek from Lady Lochore.

“Help, help!”

Ellinor sprang to the rescue. But her father had already forestalled her. When she reached the spot he was in the act of plucking the dumb boy’s great hands from Lady Lochore’s throat. Lady Lochore was talking volubly, in a high hysterical voice, between laughing and crying:

“He’s mad, I think! These afflicted creatures are never safe! He wants to murder me. I was just stirring David’s potion, as she told me, and he sprang on me like an ape. Ah, God! I am nearly strangled! Fortunately,” she added, with a shrieking laugh, “David’s precious potion is safe!”

She had been clasping both hands over her breast, and now rapidly passing one hand over the other, drew the folds of her kerchief closer about her throat; for glancing down, she had seen a small yellow stain upon the lace, and quickly covered it.

“But what can have happened?” exclaimed Ellinor, “Barnaby is the gentlest creature....”

Gentle, however, seemed hardly a word to apply to the lad at the moment. Struggling in Master Simon’s grasp, mouthing, gesticulating, uttering ghastly sounds, Barnaby seemed indeed to justify Lady Lochore’s epithet—mad.

“He must be shut up!” cried Master Simon, and, with unwonted harshness, shook the boy as he led him away by the collar.

Now Barnaby crouched down and whimpered. The old man paused:

“It’s possible he may have been at my drugs,” said he, looking at his servant curiously. “So—it will be interesting to watch. I will make the rogue show me by and by which it is he has been after. Strange! That would be the first time!”

“For God’s sake, lock him up, lock him up!” screamed Lady Lochore, suddenly breaking into fury. “One’s life’s not safe in this lunatic asylum, between your potions and your idiots. Lock him up, I say, or I’ll not dare trust myself alone another minute. I ought to be thankful, surely,” she turned sneering upon Ellinor, “that David’s hospitality ends for us to-morrow.”

“Come, come,” said Master Simon, as if the afflicted creature could hear him. So deep engrained was the habit of submissiveness, that it needed but the pressure of the old man’s finger to lead the culprit to the little room off the laboratory. Master Simon pointed with his finger and Barnaby crawled in, much as a dog retires to his kennel against his will, pausing to cast imploring glances back. But as the chemist closed the door and turned the key, there came a fresh outburst from within, followed by a muffled sound of sobs and cries.

Master Simon stood a moment with reflective eye, muttering to himself: he had an unwilling notion that the famous Euphrosinum Elixir might have something to say to these unpleasant symptoms.

Sir David came into the laboratory. He was seeking Ellinor; he looked neither to the right nor to the left, nor seemed aware of any other presence.

“Dear Ellinor,” said he, taking both her hands in his, “I feel more and more weary—and sleep would be most blessed. Give me the promised cup.”

“Dear David,” said Ellinor, starting from him, “it is ready.”

Lady Lochore watched them a moment, darkly intent. Then she came striding down the length of the room with great steps, her silken skirts swishing from side to side. She halted before the simpler:

“Good evening and good-bye, cousin!”

“Stay a moment,” said he perturbedly. “That phial——”

“What of it?” she cried, and her eyes shot defiance.

“I have been thinking, my child—not that I have any doubt of it, for it is a grand drug—but I have been thinking it might be better, perhaps, if I prepared a more diluted solution. Give me back that bottle.”

“Not for the world!” said she harshly, and fingered the empty bottle in her bosom. “What, can you not trust me? Oh, it’s precious, precious!” Her voice rang again with wild note. “It has given me back my life.”

She turned to gaze once more, with chin bent down and half-closed eyes, at the figures of Ellinor and David at the distant end of the room. “Look, look! She pours his draught into the cup. From her hand he takes it! ‘Dear Ellinor, sleep would be most blessed to-night.’ He drinks! He will sleep——” So the interior voice, shrill in the silence of her soul. Then aloud:

“Good evening, cousin Simon, and good-bye!” she repeated.

She again took up her interrupted way. As she drew nearer to the door:

“And good-bye to you, David, sleep well!” she called from the threshold upon a strange high pitch.

Master Simon looked after her, shook his head, drew a deep breath of doubt through his nostrils and ran his hand distractedly through his beard. He was very tired, and felt a certain confusion in his head, succeeding the exhilaration of an hour ago. Belphegor was humped in a corner. Nothing seemed to be going quite according to calculations. David passed him with a quick step. “I am going to sleep,” said he, in a curious still voice, as he went by.

Sleep! It was a pleasing suggestion.

“Ellinor,” said the old man plaintively, “if there is any of that calming decoction left, I think I might do well to partake of it myself to-night.”

“There is a whole cup still,” said Ellinor, and turned back to the shelf.

# BOOK III — CHAPTER XII TO SLEEP—PERCHANCE TO DREAM!

CHAPTER XII TO SLEEP—PERCHANCE TO DREAM!

My heart a charmed slumber keeps And a languid fire creeps Through my veins to all my frame, Dissolvingly and slowly: soon From thy rose-red lips my name Floweth. And then, as in a swoon, With dinning sounds my ears are rife. My tremulous tongue faltereth. I lose my colour, I lose my breath, I drink the cup of a costly death Brimmed with delirious draughts of warmest life! —TENNYSON (*Eleänore*).

Ellinor brought so weary a body, so weary a mind to bed that night, that almost as soon as her head touched the pillow she fell into a deep dreamless sleep.

But before long a dim consciousness of trouble began to stir within her mind, a feeling of sorrow and oppression to bring sighs from her breast. There was in her ears a sound as of lamentation and tears. At first this was vaguely interwoven with her own sub-acute consciousness of distress; but presently, and suddenly it seemed, it became so insistent that she started and sat straight up in bed, eyes and ears alert, staring and listening.

It was her custom to keep both her windows uncurtained at night, so that, waking, she might exchange a look with his stars, and sleeping, let them look at her. One window was always wide open. Like a flower, she craved for all the light and air that heaven and earth could give.

She sat and stared and listened. Not from her own heart, as she at first thought, did these sounds of trouble ring in her dream: attuned to trouble

as it was, her heart had but echoed another's misery. Something—what was it? Nothing human, surely—was appealing, calling with moans and whines, like that of some piteous trapped animal that clamours to the unhearing skies. Aye, and that square of closed moonlit window, where there should be but the silhouette of an ivy spray or two, was blocked out by some monstrous shape. Again she thought it was nothing human, though the casement shook and there were sounds of taps as if from desperate hands. Her pulses beat thick and hard in her temples and she had a moment's paralysing terror. But she was at least a fearless woman. The next instant she sprang out of bed, and wrapping herself in the cloak that lay to her hand, she seized the rushlight and advanced boldly. Before raising an alarm she would see for herself what the thing was.

She had not reached within a yard of the window, when with an exclamation of mingled relief and astonishment, she laid the light aside and sprang forward and flung open the casement.

"Barnaby!" she cried, and drew the boy by main force into the room.

He fell like a dead weight at her feet, exhausted, unable to sustain himself, his hands feebly closing upon the hem of her garment as if thereby clinging to safety.

On the wall of the Herb-Garden the young poetaster Herrick had sought a sentimental seat from which he could feast his love-lorn gaze on the windows of Mrs. Marvel's chamber; and, watching the tiny flickering light within rise and sink against the naked panes, feast his heart on God knows what innocently passionate dreams.

It was an ideal night for such dreamings; and the Italian-soft airs that blew upon young Romeo's cheek could scarcely have been more tender than this English Lammas-night breath that gently fanned young Luke's ardour. A night of nights to sit lost in luxurious despair, to rock a fancied sorrow and a fanciful love with poetic metre and rhyme; to weave the

sacred thought of the lady's bower with the melancholy of the moonlit hour, the sob of unrequited love with the plaint of the night-bird in the grove.

To this idyllic love-dream what an awakening! Shattering these ideals how brutal, how horrid a reality!

There came running steps in the shaded garden paths, a black, furtive figure across a white-lit garden space; and then—Herrick looked and rubbed his eyes like a child and looked again before he could believe—a man's figure, to his distressed vision tall and largely proportioned, climbing, yes, ye gods! climbing up, up, the ivy ropes, up to that window where his own fancy hardly dared to-night to reach, albeit with such reverend haltings, with such swoonings almost from its own temerity.

The night picture swam before his eyes. He gripped the stones on either side of him. When the mists cleared, he must look again. He looked and saw a white figure, all white even as he had held her to be—all white above the world—was it a minute, was it a lifetime ago? The white figure opened its arms, drew into its embrace the dark visitor. All the whiteness seemed to become lost in the blackness. Black, too, it grew before the eyes of the youthful poet—black the whole world and black his heart!

He let himself drop from his perch down into the herb-beds. And there he lay, crushing vervaine and balsam and sweet thyme into aromatic death. There he lay a long, long time.

Mistress Margery Nutmeg had tied her goffered nightcap under her decent chin and laid her respectable head upon a chaste pillow with all her usual expectation of that rest which is the reward of an excellent conscience. But (as she afterwards averred) the first strange thing in a night which was to prove one of the strangest at Bindon-Cheveral was that she could not sleep. She felt, she said, as if the Angel of Death was beating his wings about the House; and whenever she closed her eyes she

saw rows of little phials before her; and, considering she was so much accustomed to poor dear Master Rickart's odd ways, it was the most curious thing of all that she could not get the thought of Poison out of her head. At last she could almost have believed she was beginning to doze when there came sounds without her window as of a tapping, a scratching, a scraping, a rustling.

She listened; there was no mistake. Out of bed she got. Out of the window she looked!

In Lady Lochore's boudoir, despite the midnight hour, the candles were still burning in goodly array, illuminating round the green board four tired faces, the play of eight hands, the flutter of cards and the flash of dice. Two of these faces showed greedy interest: the wax-like pale-orbed countenance, to wit, of the Dishonourable Caroline and the oriental visage of Villars. But the third, Lady Lochore's, fever-spotted and haunted, beheld the capricious fortunes of chance ebb or flow with equal indifference. What cared she whether gold grew in a little pile beside her, or whether she had to jot down sums no banker would credit now to the name of Lochore? As little for the game, as little for loss or profit, as small Priscilla herself, whose black-rimmed eyes pleaded for bed, who took no pains to conceal her yawns and played her cards as if she were already in a dream.

Yet Lady Lochore was eager to keep company about her to-night. She was the first to insist on the fresh round; the first to press the willing elderly gamblers to another cast. It seemed as if she wanted to throw her heart into the excitement; to hear the rattle of the dice and her own loud laugh; to force herself to interest in her opponents' wrangles; to pin her attention to the adding of points and the deduction of loss and gain—as if she welcomed anything that might drown the small insistent whisper at her ear. Anything to drive away the vision of the great four-post bed waiting for her in the night's solitude.

Crouching at Ellinor's feet, Barnaby was trying to tell her, to tell her something, to get her aid for something, with all the agonised effort of the human soul struggling to find expression through limitations worse than those of the brute animal. Deaf and dumb, and so vital a message to be conveyed!

With patience as pitiful as the creature was pitiable, Ellinor bent and tried in vain to understand.

How he had come to seek her in so perilous a fashion she had, however, no difficulty in divining. It was but too likely that Master Simon in his present condition had been oblivious of his prisoner, insensible of his cries and knocks. But, with his ape-like activity, the lad could escape easily enough through the window; and she was herself the only person from whom he could confidently seek help. All that she could understand readily enough. But why should he require this help?

As a first thought she endeavoured to discover if he were hungry; he vehemently shook his head. He almost struck from her hand the glass of water she, misled by his repeated gesture of one in the act of drinking, then held to his lips. He was obviously in sore need of restorative, but the mental distress overshadowed the physical. Now his plucking fingers began to urge her to the door: he pointed, dragged himself a little way on his hands and knees, like a dog, came back and again pulled her towards it.

Ellinor might have been more alarmed had she not remembered his attack on Lady Lochore, and been persuaded that the poor fellow was still suffering from the effects of her father's mania for experiment.

She resolved at length to humour the boy as far as she could, and at the same time, from her own little pharmacy downstairs, to obtain some harmless sedative and then coax him into bed again. Drawing her cloak more closely over her white garb, she took up the rushlight in one hand

and extended the other to Barnaby, who in joy staggered to his feet and precipitated himself forward.

As they entered the ante-room there came from the stone passage without a sound of unfaltering steps, approaching with singular rapidity. They hardly seemed to halt a second upon the threshold of the outer door before its lock was turned and it opened before them.

Ellinor glanced at Barnaby in surprise, and marked a sudden terror in his face that infected her in spite of herself. But the next instant, as she looked round to see Sir David standing before her, sprung as it were out of the blackness, the feeling gave way to a glow of courage. Ellinor's heart always rose to the fence. Barnaby, however, remained very differently impressed; the human soul in him seemed to wither away in fear. Like an animal before some abnormal manifestation of nature, he crept back, cowering, with eyes fixed on the new-comer's face, to the further corner of the inner room.

So impossible a situation was it that her cousin should seek her in her own apartment at midnight, that it hardly needed the look on his face to convince her that something was strangely wrong.

Faint as was the gleam of colour thrown by the rushlight she held aloft, his countenance appeared to her all transfigured; so much so that she had an unreasoning impression that his white face itself diffused radiance in the gloom. His heavy hair was tossed away from his forehead as if wild fingers had played with it. Fragments of moss, a withered leaf here and there, clung to his garments; but it did not need this evidence to tell Ellinor that he was straight from the woods—the breath of the trees and of the deep night emanated from him, fresh and pungent, indescribable.

"David!" she cried, retreating step by step from his advance. "I thought, I hoped you had been asleep!"

“Asleep!” he answered. He tossed his hair from his brow. “Nay, Ellinor I have but just awakened from a long, long sleep: from a sleep like the sleep of death.”

Notwithstanding his pallor, he looked strong and young; the tired lines and the unconscious frown of sorrow were smoothed away. Slowly she had stepped back into the inner room and he had followed eagerly. She had little thought at the moment for transgressed conventions. Every energy of her being was absorbed in the desire so to deal with him as to give no shock to a brain acting under some inexplicable influence. She instinctively felt that he must be treated even as the sleep-walker who has above all things to be guarded against sudden waking.

Assuming a look of perfect calmness, she lit her candles and made him welcome with a smile as if her white bedchamber had been a drawing-room, and she, in her cloaked nightdress, had worn garments of state.

“Sit down, dear cousin, and we can talk a little—but not long, for we both must sleep.”

His eye clung to her, as she moved about, with an unfaltering gaze of delight. So had she seen him look at his stars! In her turmoil of doubt and anxiety there was an under movement, as of a long conceived joy that had strength to stir at last. Even if he were distraught, he loved her! But the impression that things were ill with him soon devoured every other.

“I, sit down!” he cried. “I, sleep! Nay, Ellinor, do you not understand! I have been in bondage all this time, and now this blessed cup you gave me has set my soul free. First it ran like fire through my veins. It drove me out into the woods, I ran among the singing trees. I cannot tell how it was with me, but I felt strength growing within my soul. There was struggle, there was pain, but this giant strength grew up. I fought. One by one I broke the rusting chains that so long have bound me—I threw the links

away! Memories, doubt, hate, despondency, I cast them all by! I stood in the glade, looked up to the stars. I was free—free, Ellinor, free to act, free to speak. To love you, to love you...! Then the trees took voice: ‘Go to her!’ they said, and waved their arms towards you. They ran with me. Straight as the arrow from the bow, I started, leaping over the mountains. And now, Ellinor, love, I have come!”

He drew near to her as he spoke, and in his hands, cold as ice, he held both hers. She would not have drawn away if she could. About herself with David she had not a second’s doubt; by a look, she knew, she could have thrown him to her feet.

His words flowed on like ceaseless music. Was woman ever wooed by lips so eloquent and so beautiful, with touch so passionate and yet so reverent! The pity of it: it was only a dream!

“I knew you were waiting for me in your white garments, with your light burning. I knew you would open your inner door for me. Oh, faithful heart!”

Now he raised both her hands and brushed them with his lips one after the other but so lightly that she hardly knew the caress. Then she felt his arms hover about her like wings: the shadow of a lover’s embrace. He bent his face close to hers. His voice, through passionate inflexions, sank to an undertone of tenderness.

“You have stood beside me on my platform at night. You did not know it always, but you were always there! You have stood beside me in the dawn, and in the dawn I sought you in the garden. Ah, that morning I would have broken my chains and awakened to freedom if I could! Always, since that first night, my heart has been singing to you, though my lips were silent. But you heard, did you not, the song of my heart? I heard the song of yours, Ellinor, through all the evil things that beat around me, demons of the past that put troubles and discords between

two songs that should ever rise together. Do not say anything—do not tell me anything of those dark hours!" he went on, arresting her as she was about to speak. The serenity of his own countenance became disturbed for a moment, its radiance overclouded. He fixed her, with piercing question:

"Can I trust you?"

And, her true eyes on his, she made answer:

"To the death!"

He drew a long deep breath; and, with both hands, made a gesture as if thrusting back victoriously some spectre enemy. Smiling, and with exultation clanging in his voice:

"See, see," he cried, "how they fade, how they melt away! Freedom is ours!"

Now he flung his arm around her and strained her to his breast. To be held to his heart and feel the passion of his embrace—it ought to have brought to her that sweet ecstasy of trouble, which to a pure woman is sacred to her only love. But to Ellinor this moment was perhaps the cruellest of her life. Must love remain to her ever but a dream, that only in dream, or in delirium, she should be wooed! Her dominant thought, however, was still for David. She saw him, like the sleep-walker of the legend, advancing along a perilous bridge beneath which lay the chasm of madness or death.

"Oh, God," she cried in her soul, "let not mine be the hand to thrust him down!"

Then, as if in answer to her prayer, there came upon her through the open window, like a promise of peace, the vision of the night's sky. Just against the black edge of the tower, emerging even as she looked, appeared pure and bright and steady the effulgent light of the new star.

“See, David,” she said, and turned his face from its ardent seeking of her own, “there are the stars, there is your Star, looking in upon us! Shall we not go and look at her from the tower. Surely she is even more radiant than usual!”

For a second his passion resisted the gentle touch; then all at once she felt his frenzied grasp relax. She drew a long breath! She slipped from his relaxing hold as the mother slips her arm from under her sleeping child. A change came over his face; a wistful expression of struggle and doubt as between reason and madness. But the next instant the wild light flamed up again.

“The star!” he whispered, then loudly repeated: “My star!” and stretched out his arms to it, with the airy unmeasured gesture of the delirious.

Her heart stood still. Like a fire or a fever, his exaltation had but leaped up the higher for the momentary check.

“Ellinor, my star! The world’s desire, my love—I come to you!”

He made a spring towards the window, and paused. With arms still wide outstretched, he looked like some god poised before taking wing for endless space. She flung herself against him, and forced him back from the window.

“David—Beloved...!” And, almost with relief, she felt the second danger of his passion close round her again.

“My star!” he repeated exultingly. His voice rang out now with high unnatural note, now sank to rapid whispering. “Sweet miracle—the star that shines in my sky and walks in beauty beside me! You remember, you remember, Ellinor,” he whispered, “we had met already, that first night, spirit to spirit, my soul to yours, O Star, before we met in the flesh!” He laughed in joy, and she felt the scalding tears rush up to her eyes.

“Ah, poor David!”

“Oh, I knew you at once! There you shone out of the dim old room, as you had shone out of my black spaces. Your brow of radiance, your hair of fire! And your eyes—oh, blue, blue! Ellinor, you remember! I kissed you—my star! I held you and I kissed you.” The whisper now sank so low that she could hardly follow his words. A tremor had come into the arms that encompassed her. She felt as if a weakness, a dimness, were gathered upon him. “That night we opened the door and stood upon the threshold of the golden chamber. Why did we not go in? I do not know. Shall we not go in now? Ellinor, bride, give me again your lips, those lips that have haunted me waking and sleeping. Ellinor!”

The last articulate words broke way almost upon a moan. He was breathing with panting effort. Suddenly he swayed, and she upheld him. Then he failed altogether, and she guided his fall—strong as she was, it was all she could do—till he lay stretched his length on the floor at her feet. Then she knelt beside him.

His eyes looked up at her, pleading through the mists that were thickening over them. His lips, without sound, formed the prayer for her kiss. She knew not what despair was coming upon her. The apprehensions, vague yet so evil, that had yet been gathering thick about her all this strange acute hour, seemed now massed into one terrible tangible shape: in a second she must look upon its awful face. Well, what she could still give her beloved in life—that she would give from her breaking woman’s heart.

And bending down, she laid her lips upon his.

She thought it was the kiss of death. He smiled faintly, his eyelids fell. Like a child, he turned his head upon his arm and drew a long deep sigh as of the peace of repose after unutterable restlessness. She crouched down close to watch for the moment of the passing of all she loved.

Once before she had seen another strong man's life go from him as she knelt by his side; had known the very instant between the last heaving of his breast and its eternal stillness. And she thought now, that when that minute should again strike for her and she should wait for the sound of the breath that was never to come, her own life would be driven out under the pressure of that slow agony!

So prepared was she for horror that she could hardly credit her own senses when presently it was borne in upon her that his respiration was becoming gradually deeper and more assured, that his pallid face was assuming a more natural look. She slid her trembling fingers upon his hand; it was warm and humanly relaxed.

He was alive! He was asleep! The Spectre of Terror had fled from before her without unveiling its countenance. She had thought their kiss was the kiss of death, and behold, it was as the kiss of Life!

Yet the tide of relief, passionate as it was, could not carry away with it all doubt and fear. He was deaf to her call, insensible to the pressure of her fingers. Even as she knew that no man in ordinary circumstances could fall thus suddenly from waking into slumber, she knew that this was the unconsciousness of the drugged.

# BOOK III — CHAPTER XIII THOU CANST NOT SAY I DID IT

CHAPTER XIII THOU CANST NOT SAY I DID IT

O! my fear interprets. What! is he dead? —SHAKESPEARE (*Othello*).

Across a lively interchange of words between Mrs. Geary and Mr. Villars, across Lady Lochore's shrill laughter and malicious intervention, there fell a silence. It was as if a shadow had suddenly eaten up the light. Lady Lochore became rigid, and the dice-box dropped from her hand.—All looked towards the door. There stood a broad and placid figure, white-capped and white-aproned, with folded hands; a figure surely the very sight of which should have brought comfort and confidence. But Lady Lochore stared at it with terror on her face.

"Please, my lady, could I speak with you a minute?"

Sir David's sister rose slowly and moved like an automaton across the room. She lifted her hand to her contracted throat.

"I am sorry to tell you, my lady, there is something seriously amiss."

Lady Lochore spread out her arms as if groping for support. Her dry tongue clicked.

"I knew there was no use going to Sir David," continued the unctuous whisper.

Sir David! The blackness suddenly passed away from before Lady Lochore's eyes.

"Sir David, woman!" She clutched the housekeeper's wrist and pinched it sharply.

“Yes, my lady.” Margery looked mildly surprised. “Him being always lost in stars, so to speak, and locked up in his tower.”

“Then he’s not ill?” Lady Lochore flung the servant’s hand away from her. She drew a deep breath, then gave a little rasping laugh. What news she had hoped for? Relief and disappointment ran through her like cross currents.

“Ill, my lady? Sir David? Thank God, no! Not as I know, my lady.”

Margery did not often show emotion beyond a well fixed point. But she was surprised; she really was.

“Please, my lady,” began the whisper again, and Lady Lochore bent for a moment a scornful ear. Then her laughter rang out again, louder this time.

“Excellent Nutmeg! What a story! You have been having toasted cheese for supper, sure!—Listen, good people: some one has been trying to break into Margery’s sacred chamber. Oh, fie, Mrs. Nutmeg!”

Her pale lips seemed withered with her forced merriment as she turned upon the trio still sitting round the green cloth. The gamblers halted in their renewed wrangle to give her an impatient attention. Little Priscilla, arrested in a yawn, twisted a small weary face over her shoulder to stare.

“Not my chamber,” said Mrs. Nutmeg, raising her voice slightly, but otherwise quite unmoved.

“Not yours.”

“No, my lady—the chamber over mine.”

“Mrs. Marvel’s!”

And once more Maud Lochore’s hysterical mirth broke forth. The next instant it was suddenly hushed, and stillness fell again upon them.

Priscilla rose from the table and came forward three steps impetuously, then halted, crimsoning to the roots of her hair, clasping and unclasping her hands. The Dishonourable Caroline looked at her daughter for a second with a pale, hard eye, then said in a repressive tone curiously at variance with the meaning of her words:

“Thieves and housebreakers; we shall all be murdered in our beds! Let the men be called! Let search be made! Come, Priscilla.” She slowly waddled round to the girl’s side. “You shall remain in my room till the miscreants are captured. No doubt some of the gentlemen would stay within call.”

“The gentlemen—where are they?” asked Lady Lochore. Then bending her brow darkly on Margery: “But why did you not call the men?” she asked.

Margery pleated her apron.

“Please, your ladyship,” she answered, in that sort of whisper that is more effectively heard than the natural voice, “it was no thief, whoever it was. He knocked at Mrs. Marvel’s window and the window was opened to him.”

Lady Lochore gave a cry, a cry charged with a curious triumph as well as a stabbing remorse. Was her enemy delivered into her hands after all! Then that secret minute in the laboratory, that dire deed of impulse and opportunity, it had all been useless! For a brief black space she fought the thought in her heart. Well, who could tell, after all? Old Rickart was mad, mad as a hatter; and his theories, his famous discoveries might well prove but moonshine spun from his own crazy brain, while she, poor fool, was wearing out her short remnant of life with leaps and bounds, with senseless terrors, with weak repentances for a deed that perhaps had never been done! And if it were done? Up sprang her indomitable spirit. If it were done, it was well done! And, done or no, the hour of personal

vengeance was vouchsafed her at the moment she had ceased to hope for it, least expected it. She would not be Maud Lochore, with the strength of death upon her, did she not use it to the full.

Old Villars rose from his seat, his face working with varied emotions: anger, greedy curiosity, low vindictive pleasure. The Dishonourable Caroline packed her daughter's arm firmly under her own.

"It is time for bed," she asserted.

But Priscilla wrenched herself from her mother's grasp and stamped her foot.

"Where is Mr. Herrick?" she exclaimed, and burst into tears.

Meanwhile Lady Lochore was speaking in broken sentences of ejaculation and command: "Shame, disgrace upon the House of Bindon! How dared the creature bring her wanton ways under our roof? But it was well, order should be put to it all."

"Take these candles, Margery," she ordered, "and lead the way. My good friends, I crave your support. I am a daughter of this house. I have to defend its honour and expose those who would bring shame upon it. You see, you have all seen: I stand alone. My poor brother—" But her voice broke. Again the awful sickening qualm that she had been fighting against all the evening seized upon her. Of him she could not nerve herself to speak. Savagely rallying her strength, she took up her candle. "I must have some disinterested witnesses," she went on. "Come and see me pluck the mask from a smooth hypocrite's face. What's the child sobbing for? Why doesn't she go to bed as she is bid? Is she so very anxious to see Mrs. Marvel's Romeo?"

With a cruel little laugh she passed on, disdaining Villars' eagerly proffered arm.

“Thank you, but you had better follow behind, most faithful cavalier. How strange that both the other gentlemen should be missing! But we shall soon know which has the best excuse.”

Ellinor knelt brooding over her beloved, now cold to the heart again with the doubt how this might end, now reassured by the depth of his repose. There was nothing stertorous in the long easy breathing. A natural moisture had gathered on the sleeper’s brow. The fluttering irregularity of the pulse was settling down under her fingers into fuller, slower measure. That the “Good Woman’s” sleeping draught which she had herself prepared for David could produce so potent an effect was, she knew, impossible. But, however produced, it seemed, so far, beneficial.

It was for a space of time, almost happiness to see him sleep and in such peace, with the shadow of the smile her kiss had called up still upon his lips; to feel herself so necessary to him; to be alone with him and her secret in the night.

Not yet had she time to examine the wild conjectures flitting through her mind; not yet time to face the problem of saving her good name and his gentleman’s honour from the consequences of this most innocent love meeting. She wanted to taste this exquisite relief, to rest her soul upon the brown-gold wings of hope before taking up her burden again.

Suddenly an insolent knock on the panel of her door startled her from her contemplation. She had but the time to spring to her feet; and upon the flash of a single thought, to unfasten her cloak and fling it hastily over David’s body, before the knock was repeated louder and the door thrown open.

Lady Lochore stood on the threshold.

Behind her was a peering group. Ellinor, in the first moment of strained fancy, saw a thousand lights, a thousand staring eyes, a sea of faces. The next instant the tide of blood began slowly to ebb from her brain. She felt

herself strong, cold, indifferent. She knew she stood in night-garb before them all, she knew that the covered figure lay in full line of sight, in full light. She did not care. All her energies were concentrated in one fierce resolve: she would save the honour of this helpless man, no matter at what cost. So long as she had life and could stand before him, no one should lift that cloak to see who lay beneath it.

She took her post and faced the intruders:—Lady Lochore, with harpy countenance, craning forward, greedy of vengeance; Mr. Villars, with goatish face, looking over her shoulder, greedy of scandal; Margery with stony eyes, holding the candelabra up aloft to shed more light upon her enemy's shame; Mrs. Geary, staring with pallid orbs.... Ellinor clenched her arms over her heaving breast.

But they who had expected so different a scene, and thought to find a panting young Romeo behind a curtain or a suave experienced Don Juan ready with explanations, a languorous Juliet or a distraught Elvira, halted almost with fear before the strange spectacle:—the prone figure, quite still, covered away, more sinister in its suggestion than even the sight of death; the menacing woman nobly robed from the spring of her full throat to the arch of her bare foot in heavy white folds, who, in her strength and purity, might have been a model for the vestal virgin guarding her sacred fire.

Lady Lochore's indictment froze unspoken upon her lips; her face became set as in a mask of terror; the hand flung out in gesture of vindictive reprobation, finger ready pointed in scorn, shook as with palsy. Her eye quailed from the stern beauty of Ellinor's face and dropped to the dark mask on the floor; there, clear of the folds, lay a slender hand, helpless and relaxed, with the gleam of a well-known signet-ring upon the third finger. Her mouth dropped open, her terrified eyes almost started from their sockets. She flung a bewildered look around, and met full the accusing glare of Barnaby's gaze fixed upon her

from the shadow of the window curtain. Barnaby, monstrous figure, as if her crime itself had taken shape, to call for retribution!

“Lady Lochore, what do you seek here? Have you not done evil enough already in this house!”

Ellinor’s voice pierced with direct accusation to Lady Lochore’s soul. For a second the guilty woman fairly struggled for breath. Margery saved her from self-betrayal:

“Her ladyship has surely seen enough!”

Their eyes met. These words, too, were capable of a terrible undermeaning. But the housekeeper contrived to convey through her expressionless gaze a sense of support. If this woman knew the secret, she knew it as an accomplice; there was help in the thought.

“You are right,” cried Lady Lochore shrilly, “we have seen enough! Forgive me, my friends, for having brought you to such a spectacle. Back, back, shut the door. I forbid—I forbid anyone to make a step forward. Leave the creature to her shame. Oh, it is horrible!”

She beat them back with her hands as she felt Villars’ eager pressure on one side and the slow, steady advance of Mrs. Geary on the other. She knew that their fingers itched to raise the veil of that cloak. If they had raised it, she must have gone mad!

Margery firmly closed the door.

“Really, my dear Lady Lochore,” complained Villars, “I think the matter should be further investigated. I can understand your delicate repugnance, but positively that figure on the floor—Deyvil take me—it looked like a corpse!”

“Fool, do you not see it was a ruse, a trick? Ah, it has made me sick—it is too disgusting——”

She wiped the sweat from her brow, and then in truth shuddered as from a deadly nausea.

Mrs. Geary, breathing hard and fanning herself with her handkerchief, had fixed her gaze on the speaker's face. Her ideas moved very slowly, but they were sure.

"My dear, your whole behaviour is incomprehensible," she said. "Mr. Villars is quite right. The matter should be investigated. Who, and in what condition, is the man under that woman's cloak? It is our duty to elucidate the matter. Where is Mr. Herrick?"

"And for that matter, where is Colonel Harcourt?" sneered Mr. Villars.

"You shall not dare!" screamed Lady Lochore. She arrested a retrograde movement on either side with violently extended arms. "Out—back to your rooms, all of you! Are you devils, that you should want to gloat—"

Margery laid her left hand warningly on her elbow, and Lady Lochore broke off abruptly. What had she said? She had no idea herself. She could have flung herself on her face and shrieked aloud. The fearful deed was done! There could now be no more doubt. The brand of Cain was on her brow! Her death-sweat would not wash it off! It was burnt into the very bone!

She had thrust her guests into the passage with as little ceremony as Lady Macbeth dismissing the feasters. When the door of Ellinor's outer room was closed between them and that something with Sir David's signet-ring, the clutch at her heart relaxed a little and she could draw her breath with more ease. A sort of apathy began to creep over her. Margery was speaking and she could listen:

"Her ladyship being so delicate, it is quite natural she should be upset. It is her ladyship's way to act on impulse. But to find such doings under her ladyship's own roof, so to speak, and the person a close relation of the

family! Mistress Marvel is a very clever lady, and whether the gentleman were drunk or asleep—" she looked up a second swiftly at Lady Lochore, and resumed the soothing trickle of speech, "her ladyship is quite right. So long as she knows how she stands with regard to Mrs. Marvel, there had better be no open scandal, such as leads," said Margery piously, "to gentlemen's duels and the like."

There now came a patter of feet, a flutter of soft garments, a sobbing, uplifted voice—

"What was it? Which of them was it?"

"Priscilla!" Mrs. Geary caught her daughter's wrist and the girl gave a cry of pain. "Disobedient child, back to your room!"

Priscilla whimpered and writhed; but the lady maintained her firm grasp and, with dignity accepting a candle from Margery's candelabra, turned and marched the truant down the passage that led to her apartments.

Bowing and smirking, Mr. Villars, whose further advice and proffers of help were ruthlessly cut short by an impatient wave of Lady Lochore's hand, had no resource but to betake himself with his triple light in the direction of his own quarters. He had no idea of letting matters rest there, but feigned nevertheless immediate submission.

They parted in the round gallery where three corridors met—two belonging to the modern house, the third leading to the tower-wing which had been the territory of their raid. Mrs. Nutmeg looked awhile after the bobbing lights; then, with a pensive smile upon her lips, laid down the candelabra, and after some effort, for it was not usually moved, closed the heavy oaken door which shut off the tower-wing from the newer parts of the Bindon House; locked it, and in silence placed the key in her apron pocket. Lady Lochore stared at her uncomprehendingly.

“It is as well, my lady, to know that no one can get in or out of the keep end—except through the window! The lower door I locked myself and Sir David of course has his key. But it is to be hoped that none of the disturbance reach him on his tower, poor gentleman!”

The horror returned to Lady Lochore’s eyes; how much did this secret, impassive woman really know of to-night’s deeds?

“Margery!” she cried.

“Yes, my lady, it is a grand night for the stars,” said Margery. And as the other groaned: “Will your ladyship come to bed?” she went on; “I humbly hope you have not let Master Rickart give you any of his queer drugs; you don’t look yourself. He has a kind of stuff, I have heard tell, that upsets people’s brains, fills them with queer fancies, like nightmare, so to speak. And there’s been madness in the village already. Master Rickart will have a deal to explain, I’m thinking. There, my lady, you’re shivering. Come to bed!”

Lady Lochore suffered herself to be led to her room; to be unclothed and assisted into the great four-post bed. Margery’s presence, her touch, was agony to her, and yet, when she left the room, Lady Lochore could have shrieked after her. But she closed her lips, closed her eyes.

At last she was shut in alone with her own conscience. She had never before been afraid, this woman who had been ready to take death as recklessly as she had taken life. After a while, she crawled out of bed and into the adjoining room. Above the throbbing of her pulses and her own gasping respiration she could hear the light breathing from the cot. Noiselessly she parted the curtains and let an opalescent ray of moon in upon the little sleeper.

Surely, surely, when she looked upon him for whom she had done it—her boy, whom a fool and a wanton would have conspired to keep out of his rights!—this horrible agony would leave her. She would be proud

of her own courage, proud to have been strong enough to act. Crime! What was crime? The crime had been to try and defraud her child! “Ten drops madness!” How many drops could that phial have contained? Madness! Well, he had method enough in his madness to remember the way to his mistress’s arms!... “After that darkness”—the long, long Darkness! Her teeth chattered. What then? It was but retribution if his long sleep came upon him thus! Ah, they had caught the scheming widow red-handed. Red-handed was the word—oh, the hussy’s conscience was not so clear either! Why had she covered him up from their sight? Let her answer for it, she and her poisoning old father! But what was this fantastic water? Surely it was his hideous drug, little as she had had of it, that drove out this clammy sweat upon her, made her heart sink—sink with this awful sickness, filled her brain with those black fleeting shadows that even the child’s warm presence could not conjure away.

She closed her eyes, for it was almost as if the unconscious baby-visage added to her terror. But a glare swam before her inner vision, and out of it and in the midst of it, in some horrible fashion, Barnaby’s face with accusing eyes looked forth. What had brought Barnaby in Mrs. Marvel’s room—Barnaby who knew? She put her hands to her throat as if she still felt the clutch of his fingers upon it. The next instant, with a spasm of relief, she had almost called aloud with guilty Macbeth—“Thou canst not say I did it!” Let the deaf and dumb boy point and mouth and gibber, what he had seen he never could bear witness to.... Deaf and dumb—oh rare!

She stood beside the cot and gazed with a desperate tenderness upon it. There now slept the lord of Bindon! His fortune was secured, and by her deed. She bent her head to kiss the little chubby hand. But before her lips had reached it she shuddered back:—between her and her child’s hand rose the vision of another hand, pale, limp, with a signet-ring.

# BOOK III — CHAPTER XIV JEALOUS WATCHERS OF THE NIGHT

## CHAPTER XIV JEALOUS WATCHERS OF THE NIGHT

Fie on't! Oh fie! 'Tis an unweeded garden That's gone to seed: things rank and gross in nature Possess it merely.... ... Frailty thy name is woman! —SHAKESPEARE (*Hamlet*).

It was late at night when Colonel Harcourt dismounted, stiff and tired, in front of the *Cheveral Arms*. He had successfully sought at Bath a pair of friends who were to call upon Sir David on the morrow; but he had, somewhat morosely, declined their proffered hospitality. For some ill-defined reason he had been drawn back to Bindon.

The sleepy landlord had but a poor supper to serve: *per contra* an excellent bottle of wine. One, indeed, that so curiously resembled the Clos-Royal of which the colonel had approved at Bindon House that, as he tasted it, he found himself sardonically regretting that he had not pressed a more handsome gratuity into old Giles's palm.

Indeed, he soon called for another bottle. Yet he was in no better a humour after the cracking of the second seal. The thoughts seething in his brain remained as dark and heavy as the liquor in his glass, but were far from being as generous.

His physical equilibrium was disturbed. It had always been a part of Antony Harcourt's power with men, as with women, that no matter how seriously they might take him, he should take himself and them with gentlest ease. But to-night he was a prey to two passions that would not let their presence be denied. A passion of resentment against his whilom

host; a longing to feel his own hand striking that cold, pale cheek, or yet to see a thin stain of blood upon that affectedly old-fashioned waistcoat spreading and running down, whilst he should smile and wonder that it should actually show red.

The other passion! He was in love with the widow Marvel—as damnably in love as the raw boy, Herrick, himself, with the added torture of the *roué* who has never yet known denial, of the materialist who can console himself with no poetic fancies and can dull his senses with no falutin of sensibility.

A month ago, if anyone had told him that his elegant person should house two such wild beasts, he would not have thought the suggestion even worth the trouble of a smile. Now, as he lay back on his wooden chair, eyeing the ruby in his glass with a deep, vindictive eye, Colonel Harcourt felt his savage guests tear at him, and was in as dangerous a mood as ever undid a fool or made a criminal. All at once the heat of the room, of the wine, of his own fierce mood, stifled him. He rose, lit himself a cigar, and sallied out, bare-headed and uncloaked, into the sweet, still night.

The inn stood a little apart from the village—a gunshot distance from the gates of Bindon Park. Colonel Harcourt paced a few steps down the moonlit white road and paused, drawing reflective puffs, feeling almost without noticing how grateful was the cool air upon his head, hearing without listening the mysterious whisper of the trees on the other side of the park walls. He moved his cigar from his lips and hesitated.

Then, on an impulse that was as sudden as it was purposeless, he turned off from the hard road, silver in the moonlight, and struck over the stile into the darkness of the narrow, tree-shaded path that led to the church on the grounds. From this, giving the Rectory a wide berth, he branched off, and, aimlessly enough, directed his steps towards the House. Twelve strokes of the night floated gravely from the little square church tower. A dog bayed in the village and was answered in deeper note from Bindon

stable-yards. On went Antony Harcourt fitfully, slowly, now pausing, now beating time with steady footfall to an evil little pipe of song that the dark secret world and his own heart seemed to take up, one after the other, like a catch.

A dry stick snapped sharply under his feet, the light of a lantern flashed upon his face, a hand fell heavily on his shoulder. It was one of the keepers, who instantly apologised profoundly to Bindon's personable guest and sped him on his way with a reverential "Good-night, sir," succeeded by a stare and a shrug. The ways of gentle-folk were strange.

Burgundy is a wine that long remains hot in the blood. Colonel Harcourt's pulses were throbbing. A curious excitement pervaded his being. Like the sails of a mill under a fitful breeze, anon his brain whirled with plans, anon seemed to stagnate, unable to formulate a thought. He found himself at last standing at the entrance of the ruins, at the back of the Herb-Garden. Before him the tower-wing of the house cut the shimmering star-shine with pointed gable, with massed chimney stack, with the huge black square of the keep, all fantastically picked out by stripes of moonlight. The curious exotic spices of the Herb-Garden rose against his nostrils.

He flung upwards a look of scorn:—was the brain-sick star-gazer even now at his telescope? Upon the sweep of his downward glance an illumined window caught and arrested his attention. He made a rapid calculation from the gables—Mistress Marvel's window!

Lady Lochore still kept them at late hours it seemed, in this whilom sleepy house! The fair widow was doubtless but just disrobing for the night. As he gazed somewhat sentimentally—what tricks will Clos-Royal and the witchery of a Lammas-night play even with a middle-aged gentleman of vast experience and acute sense of humour!—suddenly he started and stared, open mouthed upon a curse.

Something black and tall and slight, a man's figure, had appeared against the bright open window, cutting it across with outstretched arms and, almost at the same moment, something dimly pale and of soft outline, a woman's figure, flung itself between his eyes and the unexpected vision. He caught a glimpse of white bare arms. Then all vanished again as if it had not been, and there was naught but the lighted window, open to the night, confiding, innocent, tranquil.

Colonel Harcourt gnashed his teeth and cursed long and deep within himself. For all his libertine theories and Lady Lochore's denunciations he had never doubted for a moment but that Mrs. Marvel's favours were a prize as yet untouched. And now—behold! One more audacious than himself had slily reached up and plucked the golden fruit!

"By the Lord, I'll run that Lovelace to earth!" This was the first articulate thing out of his fury.

He began scrambling through the ruins in his frantic desire to reach a closer point of view. A dangerous way, in truth, but one that would perchance prove more dangerous by daylight, since the perils that are unknown do not exist and the god of chance proverbially favours the reckless. Colonel Harcourt risked his life a score of times and knew it not. Hot in his determination, he scarcely felt the hurt when he fell; and, when he spurned the crumbling, slipping stone beside him, the sound of its drop into unknown vaults evoked no image of what he himself had escaped. As little had he heeded the song of the bullet in his ear or the roar of the mine beside him when he had led his lads up the French lines at Barrosa, a dozen years before. Torn, panting, bruised, he landed at length safely on a poison-plot of the Herb-Garden. Even as he looked up again the light at the gable-end window went out.

With that light went out his own heat of disappointed passion. *Homme à bonnes fortunes* as he was, he was not the man to care to come second anywhere. Mrs. Marvel's chief charm after all had been her

unattainableness. The colonel, as he stood in the moonlight, was all at once a sober man. It seemed to him now that, culminating with that second bottle, he had gradually been getting drunk this whole fantastic fortnight.

“What, in all the devils’ names, did it really matter that a weak-minded recluse should slight him and his fellow guests, that he should have taken upon himself this absurd challenge, from which there was now no retreat? What was there in the country widow? And why should he have seen red because of the timely discovery that she was wanton and not virtuous? And how the devil was he to get out of this infernal garden?”

A pretty situation wherein to bring his forty-eight years’ experience and his thirteen stone of flesh! As he ruefully felt over his bruised body and damaged garments, his fingers struck against a hard outline in his waistcoat pocket. The key! He gave a soft chuckle. It was a poor end to a summer night’s venture, but an undoubted relief to be able to extricate oneself in commonplace fashion by walking out through an open gate.

Wrapping his philosophical humour round him as the best cloak to cover his sense of moral dilapidation, he was cautiously picking his way, when he became aware of a hasty footstep behind him. As he turned round, the moonlight showed him a tall, slender black figure, a haggard, white face!

“Luke Herrick!”

“Colonel Harcourt!”

The older man was the first to speak. He was not astonished—only (he told himself) highly amused. There was a tone in his voice, however, which belonged less to amusement than to some biting desire to use the keenest-edged weapon wits could provide.

“How fortunate that I should have the key of the gate and be able to let you out, Mr. Herrick!”

He began to fumble for the lock in the darkness of that shaded spot, and laughed as he felt the young man press forward suddenly behind him and then draw back a step with a hissing breath. The gate creaked on its hinges. Colonel Harcourt, with a gesture the mocking courtesy of which was lost in the night, invited the other to proceed.

“After you, sir. Why do you hesitate? It is quite fit that dashing youth should take precedence of middle-age on certain occasions.”

Herrick clenched his fist; then with a desperate effort regained control of his most sore and injured self and stalked out of the garden, spurning that earth his feet would tread for the last time.

“You walk late, my young friend,” resumed Harcourt, as he joined him.

“So do you, sir!” cried Herrick thickly.

The colonel laughed with quite a mellow sound. In proportion as Herrick’s discomfiture became manifest his own geniality returned.

“Our ways lie together as far as the moat-bridge,” remarked he.

Herrick made no reply. What though she had fallen, and fallen to such an one, she was still a woman; and through him, who had worshipped her, shame should not come upon her. Let Harcourt mock and jeer in his triumph, he would be patient ... till a fitter moment.

“By George! our little Romeo is discreet,” thought the colonel. “But I’ll loosen your tongue yet, you dog!—A charming night!” quoth he aloud. “Delightful last remembrance to carry away with one, is it not?”

Herrick paused for an appreciable instant; then steadily took up his way again, still in silence.

“I presume you leave to-morrow?” pursued the elder man. “Our good host——”

“You, I presume,” interrupted Herrick, “intend to remain, at least in the neighbourhood!”

They were in the thickest shade of the shrubbery, but each knew the other’s eye upon him. Their attitude, morally, was like that of men fencing in the dark, feeling blade on blade yet never venturing a full thrust.

“You are right. I do not leave just yet. In truth, I have a transaction to complete before I altogether withdraw from this delightful spot. But you——”

“I, sir?” echoed Luke, breathing quickly through his nostrils.

“Oh, you——” Harcourt laughed good-humouredly, almost paternally. “I was going, I declare, to commit the folly, unpardonable in my years, of offering a young man advice. I was going to say, my good lad, that from the poetic point of view, your visit here must have been so inspiring, so, what shall I say? so eminently successful, that it would be a thousand pities for you to prolong it. Disillusion,” he added, with a light sigh, “swiftly follows upon joy.”

Herrick chewed a thousand savage retorts, but let not one escape beyond his clenched teeth.

“You have doubtless a vast experience, sir,” he responded at last; and the colonel was forced to admit in his own mind that his adversary was stronger than he had deemed him.

In this mood they reached the moat-bridge, and the full-spaced moonlight. Then both paused, and, for the first time, saw each other clearly. The imaginary rivals stood a moment and took stock of each other’s tell-tale appearance.

“By the Lord,” thought Colonel Harcourt, running his eye sardonically over the dark stains on Herrick’s handsome evening suit, his tossed and

dishevelled hair, “it is all correct and complete! He’s had to come down by the window! The deuce!... I who thought the situation would have suited me!” He had another quiet laugh which enraged the youth almost beyond endurance. For one voluptuous moment Herrick saw himself laying this triumphant elderly Lothario at his feet. For every stain, for every rent in that riding suit, for every stone scratch on those heavy boots—brute beast, who could enter thus into his lady’s presence!—he should feel the cuffing of an honest fist! Nor were Colonel Harcourt’s next words likely to conduce to the young man’s self-control.

“Most poetical Herrick,” he said, “you have lost your hat, and you are in sad need of a brush!”

“For the matter of that, sir, where is your hat? And as for requiring a brush——”

Then he clenched his fist, this time for a most deliberate purpose. The situation was undoubtedly strained. Suddenly a piping voice drew their attention to quite a new quarter.—Upon the other side of the moat-bridge stood the quaint be-frilled, be-ringletted, tightly be-pantalooned figure of Mr. Villars. And even as they gazed this worthy hobbled across and came close to them, his face under the moonlight visibly quivering with excitement.

“My dear Harcourt! ... Luke, my poor lad!”

They turned upon him like angry dogs disturbed in the preliminaries of a private quarrel. The colonel’s somewhat precarious and thin-spread geniality was not proof against this witness of his inexplicable plight.

“My good friends,” pursued Villars, the mystification on his countenance giving way to a gloating delight as he looked from one to the other, “what has happened? This has been indeed a night of adventures! We thought you had gone to Bath, Colonel. Luke, lad, the ladies have missed you—at least some of them, he—he—he!” The skin of his dry hands

crackled as he rubbed them. “This is extraordinary. This is something quite romantic, he—he!”

“Mr. Villars,” interrupted Harcourt suddenly, “is it not time you were in your beauty sleep, and your hair in curl papers?”

He turned his broad back upon the inquisitive gentleman and fixed Herrick for a couple of seconds with a hard straight look.

“Colonel Harcourt,” cried the boy hotly in answer, “I am at your service.”

“Mr. Herrick,” returned the other, “you are an understanding youth. I regret to be unable to respond just now as I should wish. But in a few days perhaps—I have a good memory.”

His tone was now as hard as his eye. He nodded towards the speechless poet with a little wave of the hand that was full of significance. Then without further noticing Mr. Villars, he turned on his heel and walked away towards the trees where he was instantly swallowed in the black shadows.

As Herrick stood glaring after him into space, his wrist was seized and a wrinkled eager face was thrust offensively close to his.

“My dear boy, I know all about it—all about it. The Deyvil! But that was a brilliant idea of yours to fox under that cloak. Her suggestion, eh? Naughty boy. Lucky dog, he—he! But what about the colonel, eh? What? You don’t mean to say the pretty widow has two——”

In the great silence of this hour before the dawn the sound of a master slap rang out sharp as a pistol shot; and the echo of it came back like a jeer from the terrace walls.

“A raving lunatic,” said Villars to himself with wry lips, as he nursed his cheek and blankly watched Herrick stride towards the house. “Certainly not worth taking the least notice of!”

Nevertheless, if that young man’s paper ever fell into his hands!

But Herrick was taking to his rooms a heart heavy enough to have satisfied even the financier’s vindictiveness.

# BOOK III — CHAPTER XV A SIMPLER'S EUTHANASIA

## CHAPTER XV A SIMPLER'S EUTHANASIA

Tired, he sleeps, and life's poor play is o'er. —POPE (*Essay on Man*).

Ellinor, after hastily donning a few garments, stole on light foot in her visitors' wake and reached the cross-door at the instant when, on the other side, the key was being turned by Margery. There she waited in the darkness until voices and footsteps had died away beyond, when, feeling for the old disused bolt on the inside, she drew it into its socket. Then she ran back to her own room. She had arduous work to perform before Margery should have time to return round by all the basement passages to the keep wing and resume her office of spy. She had, by some means or other, to convey David back to his tower so that none should ever know the truth of this night's events—none but he and she.

How with her unaided strength she was to achieve this she did not stop to consider: it must be done. As she re-entered the room it was a joyful relief to find Barnaby kneeling on the floor beside Sir David.—Barnaby! In the agitation of the night she had forgotten his presence. Barnaby—the ideal silent helper.

The dumb lad looked up, nodded, then pillowed his cheek on his hand, closed his eyes, drew a few deep breaths in pantomime of sleep and nodded again. She knelt down for a moment beside him and laid her hand lightly on David's brow and over his heart. It was in truth a deep, and it seemed a healing, sleep. Then she rose to her purpose. And in a shorter space of time than she had dared to hope, Barnaby with her help had safely laid Sir David on the couch in the observatory. A pillow was

placed under his head, his furred cloak over his feet; and still he slept like a tired-out soldier.

After a quick look round, Ellinor closed the rolling dome and shut out the sky, drew the heavy curtains before the door, and, satisfied that all was as well as she could make it, was hurrying forth again when Barnaby arrested her.

He had been passive enough under her imperative demand for help, but now, to her surprise, the old look of distress and pleading had returned upon his face. Again he plucked her by the sleeve and gesticulated, then stopped short, pointed to the sleeper, and once more made that gesture of conveying something to his lips which he had repeated so often after his attack on Lady Lochore that afternoon.

Ellinor stood still, palsied by the lightning stroke that flashed into her brain: she had divided the cup between David and her father! Now she knew who it was Barnaby was seeking help for with such persistence.

The space of time between the moments when she fled from David's side and reached the threshold of the laboratory was ever a blank in Ellinor's memory. She had no consciousness even of Barnaby's piteous joy at being at last understood, of the long passages, the steep, winding stairs, down and ever down. She never knew that she had crossed Margery coming up with lighted candle, and staring at them in blank amazement. She only knew that, when she stood upon the threshold of the room that had received her with so dear a welcome, there in his chair, under the light of the lamp, sat Master Simon, his grey head fallen forward on his breast. He seemed profoundly and peacefully asleep—just as she had left David. But even before she had laid her hand on his forehead to find it stone cold, she knew in her heart that her father was dead.

Squatting on the old man's knee, Belphegor gazed at her inquiringly with yellow eyes.

Out of warm slumber, tinted like his books with rich and sober hues of fawn and russet, with here and there a glint of faded gold, Parson Tutterville was roused in the chill encircling dawn by a cry beneath his windows—a wild and urgent cry that drew him from his down before he was well awake:

“Uncle Horatio, for God’s sake!”

And as he thrust his night-capped head out of the casement, he asked himself if he had not suddenly wandered into a terrible dream, for the voice went on:

“My father is dead, and David, for aught I know, is dying!”

# BOOK III — CHAPTER XVI THE TIME IS OUT OF JOINT

CHAPTER XVI THE TIME IS OUT OF JOINT

“Thou Ghost,” I said, “and is thy name To-day?— Yesterday’s son, with such an abject brow!— And can To-morrow be more pale than thou?” While yet I spoke, the silence answered: Yea, Henceforth our issue is all grieved and grey.... —ROSSETTI (*The House of Life*).

The morning after Master Simon’s death was filled for Parson Tutterville with sadder and more responsible duties than any in his experience. Before a stormy scarlet sun had well cleared the eastern line of the hill he was standing with Mr. Webb (the country practitioner) by the body of his life-long friend, and listening to the professional verdict on the obvious fact.

The medical man, a not particularly sagacious specimen of his order, who had for many years treated Master Rickart’s pursuits with the contempt of prejudice, discovered no specific symptoms of any known toxic, declared the death to be perfectly natural and announced his intention of so certifying it. This decision was, in the circumstances, too desirable not to be accepted with alacrity.

Leaving Ellinor at the head of the truckle-bed whereon lay the shrunken figure with the waxen, silver-bearded face—the one so pitiably small under the white sheet, the other so startlingly great with the peace of the striving thinker who has attained Truth at last—the Doctor of Divinity led the Doctor of Medicine away, and hurried him from the side of the dead to that of the living patient. As he mounted the weary stairs, his mind was uncomfortably haunted by the remembrance of Ellinor’s haggard and wistful eyes, of her unnatural composure. She had not shed a

tear, though the rector's own eyes had overflowed at the sound of Barnaby's sobs. With dry lips she had told him a brief, bald story:

"My father was making experiments all day with his new extract. I divided the sleeping draught between him and David. Barnaby called me in the night. I found my father dead. When I tried to rouse David, I could not. He lies in a deep sleep in the observatory."

His insistent questions could draw no further detail from her. It was almost like a lesson learnt off by heart; each time she replied in exactly the same words.

Mr. Webb, who had been almost brutally superficial upon the cause of his old antagonist's death, became extremely learned and involved over Sir David's case. But the parson, accustomed by his calling to the sight of the sick, was happily able to see for himself that David's sleep, though abnormally profound, was restful; he promptly took it upon himself to interfere when the doctor offered to proceed to blistering and blood-letting as a rousing treatment.

Somewhat unceremoniously he insisted on his withdrawal; and, returning himself to the observatory, stood gazing at his friend for some time before determining on the step of sending a post-boy into Bath for a more noted physician. As the divine was thus pondering, David suddenly opened his eyes, saw and recognised him, without surprise; smiled and fell asleep again. And Dr. Tutterville felt greatly reassured. Whatever the cup may have contained that Ellinor had divided between the star-dreamer and the simpler, here it was evident that nature was working her own cure and that no other physician was needed.

Upon this the parson carefully piloted Dr. Webb out of the tower-wing and delivered him to Giles to be ministered unto as the hour required. Then he sent a note to his good lady, bidding her come and take up her

post by David's couch until he could himself relieve her watch. His heart was much eased.

He was on his way to bring his consoling report to Ellinor, when, at a corner of the passage, he heard his name called in a hoarse whisper, and, looking round, beheld Lady Lochore, ghastly-faced, in her flaming brocade dressing-gown.

"How is it with——" she cried. Something seemed to click in her throat, she could not pronounce the name. But Dr. Tutterville thought that her twitching hand pointed towards the laboratory door. He shook his head.

"Alas, I fear there is nothing to be done!"

Her lips framed the word:

"Dead!"

Then she swayed and he had to uphold her.

"Come, come!" said he soothingly, yet shuddering all over his comfortable flesh to feel what skeleton attenuation lay between his hands. "My dear child, do not give way to this. There is nothing, there can be really nothing alarming about the passing away of one who has attained the allotted span. Poor Simon!"

She reared herself with extraordinary energy to fix eyes full of fierce questioning upon him. He went on:

"Thank God, I can quite reassure you about David—"

"David!"

She echoed the name with what was almost a shriek; then caught the end of her hanging sleeve and thrust it to her mouth, as if to keep any further sound from escaping.

“Did you not know?” asked the rector. “We were in much anxiety, but whatever noxious drug was——” he stopped unwilling to raise the question.

He saw a terror come into those strange fixed eyes. Quite bewildered himself, he proceeded again, trying to reassure the woman:

“David’s in no danger, thank Heaven!”

Dropping her hand, Lady Lochore turned upon the astonished rector a countenance of such fury that he stepped back hastily as from a madwoman.

“Thank Heaven!” she repeated with a laugh, that made his blood run cold. The next instant she turned and fled from him, once more stopping her mouth with her sleeve; in spite of which the sound of her hysterical mirth continued to echo back to him down the vaulted passage after she had turned the corner. The rector remained lost in thought.

“She is very ill—dying!” he told himself. “Lord, thy hand is heavy on this house!”

Even in the secrecy of his soul he was loth to search into the weird feeling now encompassing him, that there was more than illness in Lady Lochore’s face.

The parson hoped that, under the reaction of the good news he brought her, Ellinor might obtain the relief of tears. But in this he was disappointed.

“Thank you,” she said, in a whisper; and sat down again upon the bench from which, upon his entrance, she had risen rigidly and as if bracing herself for a final blow. Her clenched hands relaxed; while the left lay passive on her knee, she began with the right absently to pat and fondle the folds of sheet that lay over her father’s cold breast.

Dr. Tutterville looked at her in puzzled silence. The action was full of a woman's tenderness, yet he intuitively felt that the thoughts behind the faintly drawn brow, under the marble composure, were not occupied with a daughter's sorrow. He felt he had been denied a confidence of vital importance. Strange things had taken place in the house, of which he had yet no explanation. Gently he laid the warm comfort of his clasp upon the woman's hand and stayed its futile caress.

"Dear child, what is it? Can I not help?"

She started, and flung a swift look at his wise and grave face. There came a sort of fear also in her eyes. Fear into the true eyes of Ellinor! Then she fell back into her abstraction.

"Thank you," she repeated in a slow dreamy tone. "I can wait."

He was pondering over the inexplicable word, when a new call drew him to other cares. "Two gentlemen," a servant informed him, "had driven over from Bath and were demanding to see Sir David. They had not seemed satisfied on being told that Sir David was not well enough to receive visitors." Visitors for Sir David! So unwonted an event these ten years that even the rector was moved to curiosity as he hastened to wait on the callers.

Pacing the library were found an elderly man of military bearing and haughty countenance, in befrogged coat and smart Hessians, and a slight, fair youth—in the extreme of the fashion, with an eyeglass on a black ribband, miraculous kerseymeres, a velvet waistcoat embroidered with gold and silver roses, and a fob with more seals and watches than any one person could require. The elder stranger turned to the younger with a sarcastic smile as the door opened; and then, with a slight bow, addressed the new-comer.

"Sir David Cheveral, I presume," he began, and stopped short.

His eyes rested in amaze upon the clerical silk hose; ran swiftly up to the long clerical waistcoat, over its gentle undulation across the unmistakable neckband, to stop at last with angry insolent stare upon the clerical countenance, handsome, dignified and self-possessed despite a fasting morning and unshaven chin. Then he flung another quizzical look at the younger man and shrugged his shoulders; whereat the latter gave vent to a shrill titter and vowed with a lisp that in all his life, by gad, he had never come across anything so rich!

“To whom have I the honour—?” asked Dr. Tutterville.

“Before we waste our breath, sir, and take you away from the thoughts of your next sermon, one word.” Thus the military gentleman, with the tone of one in superior form of courtesy mockingly addressing an inferior species. “Do you represent here Sir David Cheveral?” he asked.

“Sir David,” said the parson, with that serene ignoring of impertinence which is its best rebuke, “is unable this morning, either to receive visitors himself or to instruct a delegate.”

For a third time the visitors exchanged looks.

“A curious indisposition, evidently,” remarked the elder, slapping his Hessians with his cane. “Cursed curious!”

“Deuced opportune, by gad!” added the younger.

“No, sir,” said Dr. Tutterville, turning so suddenly and severely upon the youth that he started back a couple of paces. “No, young man, not opportune. There is death in this house, and the master of it is wanted for more important matters than either you or your friend can possibly have to communicate—I wish you good morning.” And he wheeled upon his heel with an elastic bounce.

Before he had reached the door, however, the strident voice of the well-booted visitor arrested him:

“Tis, of course, your trade, sir, to preach the peace. But the mere gentleman is prejudiced in favour of honour being considered first. However, if Sir David Cheveral, who cannot but have been prepared for our visit, has deputed you in the interest of holy peace, perhaps you will kindly bestow upon us now sufficient of your reverend time to enable us to gather what form of apology Sir David——”

The reverend Horatio again turned round, this time slowly, and showed to this trivial sneering pair a Jove-like countenance, which the wrath of natural humanity and the reprobation of the church combined to empurple.

He allowed the weight of his silent rebuke to press upon them sufficiently long for their grins to give place to looks of anger. Then he spoke. And although under the silk meshes of his stockings the very muscles were quivering with the intensity of his feelings, never in hall or pulpit had the parson delivered himself to better effect. Yet his discourse was extremely brief:

“Gentlemen—forgive me if, not having the advantage of your acquaintance, I am forced to address you thus indeterminedly—as regards the honour of Sir David Cheveral, my kinsman:

*Falsus Honor juvat et mendax infamia terret Quem nisi mendosum et mendacem?*

You may possibly fail to follow me. I will translate liberally: The dog—aye, and the puppy—may bark at the moon, it will not affect her brightness.... As regards an apology, I will take upon myself to allow you to convey this one to your principal, whoever he may be, convinced from what I know of Sir David that he will not repudiate the form of it:—If, as I gather, he is called upon to give a lesson in honourable dealing to some friend of yours, he regrets having to postpone that duty for a short while. The delay, allow me to assure you, will but the better enable him to fulfil

his part when the time comes. You will find paper and all that is necessary upon yonder table. You can write your communication to Sir David, and I will undertake to see that it is delivered at a fitting moment."

"'Pon my soul," said the elder ambassador, turning to his satellite as the door closed upon the clergyman's dignified exit—"that's a game old cock!"

"Dog! by Jove—aye, and puppy!" growled the younger man.

On the other side of the oak the rector had halted, rubbing his unusually bristly chin, and uncomfortably mindful of certain remarks from the still small voice within concerning next Sunday's sermon that was to be upon the beatitude: "Blessed are the peacemakers."

"I will change my text," thought the rector. "It were a sorry thing for a scholar and a clergyman if there were no issues from such accidental straits! 'Ye shall smite them hip and thigh!' Yes, that will do. That will meet the case."

The excellent gentleman had scarcely settled this delicate point with his conscience when he was intercepted by Mrs. Geary. The lady was in a high state of indignation, first at a death having actually been allowed to take place in a house where she was guest, secondly and especially at Lady Lochore having locked herself up in her own apartments and rudely denied her admittance. She now demanded instant means of departure for herself and her daughter; for her man and her maid. This the rector, with joy, promised to provide forthwith; and even suggested that the remaining gentlemen of the party might make use of the same conveyance with both pleasure and profit to all concerned. But even as he was congratulating himself upon an easy riddance of at least one difficulty, he was plunged into a far deeper state of perturbation by a most unexpected word:

“Mr. Herrick has already gone,” sniffed Priscilla, who stood at her mother’s elbow. Her face was swollen with crying; she spoke in a small vindictive voice which drew the parson’s attention to her in mild surprise.

Mrs. Geary tossed her head:

“I am glad to hear it,” she remarked icily, “and I am surprised you should have suggested his accompanying us.”

“My dear madam,” protested the rector, who found the look of meaning in the lady’s protuberant eye exceedingly discomforting. “My dear madam?”

“After last night’s scandal,” said she in her deepest bass.

“Last night’s scandal!” he echoed.

“Hush!” she cried, “I will not have the innocence of my child further contaminated——”

“Contaminated, madam!”

“Contaminated, sir! Ask Mrs. Marvel, Dr. Tutterville! Ask your niece!”

She brushed past, hustling Priscilla before her.

“A most unpleasant female,” thought the parson, endeavouring to dismiss Mrs. Geary from his mind. But she had left a disturbing impression, which was presently to be heightened. In response to a message, courteous, but firm, informing him at what hour the chaise would await him, Mr. Villars next presented himself before the rector and interrupted him in the midst of some of his sad business details.

“Sir?” said the parson, at the same time arresting by a gesture the withdrawing of the bailiff with whom he was then in consultation. “In what can I be of service?”

“My dear Dr. Tutterville, I came to offer my services to you.”

“You are vastly obliging, Mr. Villars. The best service friends can render a house of mourning is to leave it to itself.”

“Sad business—sad business this! Deyvilish!”

“Good-bye, sir, I trust you may have a pleasant journey. Good-bye.”

“One word, dear and reverend sir. How is—how is Mrs. Marvel?”

“Bearing up fairly well, I thank you.”

“I am rejoiced. Rejoiced. After so many emotions! Ah, I was going to suggest that it might perhaps be of some advantage, some advantage, perhaps, to Mrs. Marvel, were I to defer my departure for a day or two. I would gladly do so if——”

“I cannot conceive,” interrupted Dr. Tutterville, “any circumstance that would make this probable.”

Mr. Villars hemmed meaningly, looked at the bailiff’s stolid countenance, and winked importantly at the rector. But as the latter remained unresponsive, Mr. Villars proceeded with a point of acrimony in his tone:

“No doubt Mrs. Marvel has already given satisfactory explanation of last night’s——”

“Sir,” interposed Dr. Tutterville, opening the study door, “you force me to remark that my time is valuable.”

“Your wife’s niece, sir, I understand.”

“Mr. Villars, the chaise will be ready in half an hour.”

“Dr. Tutterville, you are making a mistake. I might have been of some use. Of use, sir, as a witness, in this unfortunate scandal——”

“Mr. Villars, I am a clergyman, and this is a house of mourning. But——”

Mr. Villars slipped suddenly like an eel through the half-open door; for there was something ominously unclerical both in the parson’s eye and in the twitching of his right hand. But as Horatio Tutterville sat down to his table and beckoned once more to the bailiff, the word scandal weighed heavily on his heart.

Half an hour later, the comforting vision of Madam Tutterville’s round countenance rose upon his cold distress like a ruddy sunrise over a winter scene. But, though she brought him upon a fair tray, crowned with a most fragrant aroma, restoratives for the inner man as well as excellent tidings of her patient in his tower, she had a further budget of news which was to add considerably to the burden of his day.

“My dear doctor,” she said with effusion, and for once unscripturally, “I came the instant I received your note. David is sleeping like a lamb. You need have no anxiety there. I shall instantly return to him. But there is no use in the world in your making yourself ill too. You were off without bite or sup this morning, and not one has thought of making you so much as a cup of tea! The world is a vastly selfish place, and I am surprised at Ellinor. Drink this coffee, my dear doctor. I have prepared some likewise for David—’tis a sovereign restorative. Nay, and you must eat too.”

The rector smiled faintly. The prospect was in sooth not ungrateful. And now that his attention was drawn to it, the unusual vacuity within became painfully obvious.

“Excellent Sophia!” he murmured.

Her coffee was always incomparable. It may be a moot point whether, in moments of man’s trouble, the woman who ministers to the creature-comforts is not the truer helpmate than the transcendental consoler.

Madam Tutterville watched her lord partake in silence. That in itself was a notable thing. She showed little of her usual satisfaction in his appetite; and that was ominous. Her whole person was clouded over with an anxiety which could not be attributed to her brother's death; a trial indeed she had promptly dismissed with two tears and one text. As soon as the rector appeared sufficiently fortified, Madam Tutterville drew a deep breath; no more odious task could be assigned to her than that of having to bring trouble to her Horatio.

"It is my duty to tell you, doctor, that there have been several calls for you this morning. I went through the village to ascertain for myself and I found indeed some cases of serious illness. The widow Green died suddenly last night. Joe (the hedger) has gone raving mad; it took four men to bind him with ropes and lock him in a barn. I heard his screams myself. Mossmason seems struck with a kind of palsy. Penelope Jones and old——"

"In God's name," cried the reverend Horatio, springing to his feet, "stop, woman, or I shall go crazy myself! What can have happened? How have we all sinned against Heaven to be thus stricken upon the same day!"

Madam Tutterville pursed her mouth for an awful whisper:

"They say," she breathed, "that poor Simon went all round the place yesterday with some of his dreadful little bottles."

The rector clapped his hands on his knees:

"Then have we indeed been mad to let him have his way so long!" For an instant the learned man looked helplessly at his wife: "What is to be done?"

"A doctor," she murmured.

“A doctor—Sophia, you’re a woman in a thousand. Not that noodle we’ve had here just now, but the best opinion from Bath. I shall despatch a post-boy. My poor simple flock!”

He had reached the door when she caught him by the skirts of his coat.

“They are raging against poor Simon in the village, and against Ellinor. It might well end in a riot. Had you not better warn constables and the headborough?”

He turned upon his heel in fresh dismay. Then resuming courage:

“Nay, nay, I must see what I can do myself first!”

But Madam Tutterville looked unconvinced.

“I believe they would tear Ellinor in pieces, were she to go out among them to-day. I have had to warn her. Horatio—Horatio, have you seen Ellinor?”

Dr. Tutterville nodded. For some undefined reasons he would have given worlds not to be obliged to discuss Ellinor just now. He tried to slip his portly person through the door, but the hand of his spouse was still restraining.

“Do you think she could have been given any of that dreadful stuff too? She is so strange in her manner. And the servants are saying such extraordinary things—not that I would allow them to do so before me—but I could not help hearing.”

With one mute look of reproach the rector wrenched himself away.

“Lord, Lord,” he was saying to himself in a grim spirit of prophecy, as he hurried towards the stables: “There will be but too much time I fear by and by, for the drawing to light of poor Ellinor’s affairs whatever they may be.”

Love is the crown of life: a life without love is a life wasted. Not necessarily must the love that crowns be that of lovers: love of saint for God, of soldier for captain, of comrade for comrade, of student for master, of partisan for King; or, again, love for the abstract object, of artist for art; of patriot for country, of philanthropist for the cause, of seekers for science—one such great love in a life is sufficient to fill it to the brim, to absorb all its energy. But how few are capable of the passion that shall crown them heroes or saints, leaders of thought or of men! Though every man and every woman avidly claim to possess in the full the power of natural love, *the real lover is a genius*. And genius, of its essence, is rare. To nearly all it is given to strum the tune, to how few is it given to bring forth the full harmony!

Ellinor had one of those rare natures especially designed for the heights and the deeps of love. It had been for many years her curse that some indefinable charm, quite apart from her beauty and strength, should, wherever she went, make her the desire of men's eyes. But she herself had passed as untouched by the flame, through her too early marriage and the ordeals to which she had been recklessly exposed, as true gold through the test-furnace.

Now, like a wave that has been gathering from the fulness of the ocean's bosom, the great waters had broken over her and were sweeping her on.

As she sat by her father's body she tried to force the image of her loss upon her mind—in vain. One single idea absorbed her; the whole energy of her being was with David. Anon she recalled every instant of his fantastic wooing of the previous night. Anon she would be seized with an agony of terror about his present condition. Again she would float away in a vague warm dream of the moment when he should awaken.... Awaken and remember! People addressed her, and she answered mechanically; but, even while answering, forgot the speaker's presence.

When Madam Tutterville came to conduct her to her room that night, Ellinor was aware that she had walked through a group of whispering and pointing servants; and she was indifferent. She felt that the good lady herself was looking at her with strange, anxious gaze; and she merely smiled vaguely back. Her soul was in the tower.

Madam Tutterville wore a grave countenance.

“Have you nothing to say to me, Ellinor?” she asked at length.

Ellinor hesitated a second; she wanted to beg for a share in the watch by David’s side; wanted to hear repeated once more the last reassuring news. But the deeper the passion the more closely the woman draws the veil about her; she could not even speak his name.

“Nothing, dear aunt,” she answered.

Madam Tutterville shook her head in troubled fashion, sighed and withdrew.

# BOOK III — CHAPTER XVII TREACHERIES OF SILENCE

## CHAPTER XVII TREACHERIES OF SILENCE

——Slander, meanest spawn of Hell, And woman's slander is the worst...! —TENNYSON (*The Letters*).

On the following morning Margery drew the curtains of Lady Lochore's bed and looked down upon her.

It was ten o'clock, and not even the barred shutters, not even the heavy hangings, could keep shafts of sunshine from piercing through. Lady Lochore wanted to shut out the light and the day and the world: whatever the news might be that the morning was to bring, whether of life or of death, they were fearful to her. And now, though she knew well enough whose eyes were fixed upon her, she feigned sleep. Margery, on her side, perfectly aware of the pretence, drew a stool with ostentatious precautions to the bedside, sat down and waited. But the feeling of being watched became quickly intolerable. Lady Lochore rolled petulantly over on her pillows.

"What in God's name do you want? Great heavens, one would imagine that you at least would know better than to disturb me!"

"My lady," cooed Margery, "Sir David is awake."

Lady Lochore sat bolt upright and, under the thin cambric and lace that fell in such empty folds over her bosom, the sudden leaping of her heart was visible.

"Awake!"

“Yes, my lady—awake and up. I thought it my duty to let your ladyship know.”

“You have seen him! You——?”

A horrible hope danced like a flame in her eyes; but even to Margery she dared not speak the question that would make it patent.

“Quite himself, yes, my lady,” went on the steady tones, answering as usual the unspoken thought. There was a lengthy silence. Then Margery began again: “Whatever drug Mrs. Marvel gave Sir David, it has done him good, my lady. I’ve not known Sir David look so well, nor speak so dear and sensible since before his—his great illness.”

Mrs. Nutmeg had respectfully shifted her gaze from her ladyship’s countenance to a knot of ribbons at her ladyship’s breast. But, nevertheless, Maud Lochore felt that her criminal soul was being mercilessly laid bare.

“Leave me alone,” she said faintly, leaning back on her pillow and turning her head away.

“I think your ladyship had better get up,” said Margery Nutmeg, and stood her ground.

By the time Maud Lochore, robed and tired, had sailed from her apartments, with head set high and determined step, to seek her brother, the housekeeper was able to retreat to her own room with the feeling that the morning’s eloquence of insinuation had not been altogether wasted. What though Fortune still seemed to favour Mrs. Marvel, the path of that would-be mistress of Bindon might yet, after all, be made rough enough to trip her.

Sir David turned his head as the door of the library opened, and Lady Lochore was involuntarily brought to a halt in her indignant entry. Those clear eyes! The steady, peaceful gaze was that of a man looking upon

health returned after long sickness. Margery was right. She was right! Sir David was himself again; and the coiling, twisting serpents within her seemed to nip at her heart in their thwarted fury. Hers had been the hand to fill this magic cup! She could have laughed aloud for the irony at it. Then there came a second thought, lashing her with an unknown terror! Was God himself against her, that the poison which had uselessly brought death and madness to so many besides old Simon, should here have turned to a healing remedy?

Sir David and the rector had been engaged in earnest converse for the last hour. The matter of the challenge had first demanded their attention. Sir David had, with a contemptuous smile, perused the letter left on his table, had listened to Dr. Tutterville's account of the interview without comment and briefly dismissed the subject with the announcement of his intention to send a messenger to Bath that day. His whole treatment of the affair was such as vastly pleased the old-fashioned spirit of the parson—a duly shaven parson, this morning, who could not keep the beam of satisfaction from his glance every time it rested upon his companion.

And yet it was a rare complication of troubles they had to face. Three deaths in the village, besides that of the poor old alchemist himself; a case of madness, and one or two of minor brain disturbance. And a general threatening resentment throughout the parish. Good cause indeed had the spiritual and the secular masters of Bindon for consultation together; little cause had they to welcome interruption. But both gentlemen rose with due courtesy; and while the parson placed a chair, Sir David took his sister's hand and led her to it, inquiring upon her health.

She looked up at him without speaking, an exceedingly bitter smile on her lips. Yes, there was no doubt about it: her brother stood before her, master of himself, master of his fate once more.

In the silence, the two men exchanged a glance as upon some pre-decided arrangement. Then the rector spoke:

“These sad events have necessarily postponed your departure; but, believe me, my dear Maud, you will do well, and it is also David’s opinion, to delay it no longer than this afternoon.”

Lady Lochore clutched the arms of her chair.

“We anticipate some excitement among the villagers,” pursued the parson. “Then there is the ceremony to-morrow. You are unfortunately in no state of health to risk painful emotions. And, in fact, David would not be doing his duty did he not insist upon your being safely out of the way.”

Lady Lochore rose stiffly.

“And Mrs. Marvel?”

The rector fell back a pace; the hissing word had struck him like a stone. But Sir David stepped forward, a light flame mounting to his brow.

“Does David consider it his duty to have Mistress Marvel also removed from this dangerous house?” she inquired, and her voice broke on a shrill laugh.

“Maud,” said her brother, almost under his breath, “have a care!”

But Lady Lochore had let herself go; the serpents were hissing, ready to strike. Glib words of venom fell from her lips:

“His duty! Touching solicitude all at once for my humble self! ’Tis vastly flattering, my God! What a model host, so preoccupied about his guests! Excellent Rector, is this your work? A conversion you may well be proud of: but is it not a little abrupt for security?” A hard cough here cut the thread of her tirade. And the acrid taste of blood, loathsome reminder of doom, brought her suddenly from irony to open rage: “Yes, turn your

sister out of the house! Turn your flesh and blood from your doors! But house the wanton, cherish the abandoned wretch that dares to call herself our kin, that brought under Bindon's roof practices that would disgrace Cremorne! Keep Mrs. Marvel, Sir David Cheveral, put her tarnished honour in our mother's place and you—and you—you sanctimonious old man, give the blessing of the church upon that degrading union! Oh, Mistress Marvel is a young, comely woman, and David is indeed converted! This time, I am glad to see, he has been more practical than with his other—lady!"

"Silence!"

It was not that the word rang very loud, or that Sir David's mien was threatening; but, as she herself had grasped the truth a little while ago, that he was master. It seemed to her now as if she must wither before him. Her voice, her laugh sank into the silence bidden. Then Sir David turned:

"She is mad!" he said, addressing the rector, and made a gesture with his hand as if dismissing a subject painful in the abstract, but unimportant to himself.

His sister's glance followed his movement to alight upon Dr. Tutterville. Then the cowering snakes reared their crests again. If he had to be slain for it, the parson could not have kept a look of perturbation, almost of guilt from his countenance; and the woman was quick to see it. She pointed her finger at him:

"Ask the reverend gentleman if I am so mad. Ask him if some account of the virtues of his niece has not already reached his consecrated ears! Oh, brother David, the mere stretching of a cloak is not quite sufficient to hide scandal."

Scandal!—that evil word again! The more burningly it stung the parson, the more gallantly he resisted the doubt.

“Maud,” said he firmly; “hearing is one thing, believing, thank Heaven, is another. Those who would assail Ellinor Marvel’s honour, I should be inclined to rebuke much more severely than David has done. Madness? No, Lady Lochore, but deliberate falsehood, the fruit of Envy, Malice and all uncharitableness.”

“Ellinor Marvel’s honour!” said Sir David. He repeated the words steadily, then threw up his head and slightly uplifted his eyes and looked away as if fixing some entrancing vision.

Health of body and health of mind had, it seemed, been restored to him by the cup of strange mixing. The morbid doubt, the fever, the long oppression—all were gone. He had faith where he loved. The expression of his face drove the furious woman nigh to the madness he had proclaimed.

“Ellinor Marvel’s honour!” she repeated in her turn, “the honour of a woman, who receives her lover in her room at midnight!”

The rector gave a short groan; it might have been horror or indignation. Sir David merely turned to stare at his sister; then he smiled in contemptuous pity.

“Oh, David, David!” cried Lady Lochore, shaking in an agony of laughter and rage, “whom do you think to take in with these hypocritical airs, this ostrich concealment? It is, of course, your interest to hush things up. Naturally! But—”

He would not permit her to finish:

“Naturally it is my interest,” he said, hotly, “to defend a woman whom I know to be as innocent of what you accuse her as I am myself; in whose honour I believe as in my own.”

In the diplomacy of life, how often does the course of fate turn to unexpected channels upon the mere speaking of one word. At the

strenuous instant of the conflict of purpose, how far-reaching may be the consequence of one phrase, perhaps pronounced too soon, or left unsaid too long!

Had David not thus cut short the speech on his sister's lips, her very next word would have rendered the object of her hatred the best service that at such a strange juncture could have been devised; and she would at the same time have dashed for ever the success of her last desperate scheme. The revealing accusation that still hung on her tongue was barely arrested in time. With her familiar gesture, she had to clap her hand to her mouth.

"Why, great God! He knows nothing! he remembers nothing! First madness, then long, long sleep! Old man, I thank thee for that fantastic drug!"

Over her gagging hand Lady Lochore's eyes danced with a flame so fierce and unholy that the bewildered and unhappy parson shuddered. He felt instinctively as if the meshes of the web which seemed to have been skilfully flung round Ellinor were tightening in remorseless hands. The very deliberation, the sudden calmness which presently came over Lady Lochore filled him with a yet deeper foreboding. She dropped her hand, stood a moment, tall and straight and dignified, as if wrapt in thought, her countenance composed: a noble looking woman, in spite of the ravages of disease, now that the unlovely mask of fury had fallen from her. Then she turned to Sir David, who had deliberately seated himself at his papers as if for him the discussion were ended, and said:

"Since neither brother nor kinsman believe my word worthy of credit, I am forced to bring other testimony—much as I should wish to spare myself and this house the humiliation."

She stretched her hand to the bell-rope, and the parson upon an impulse of weakness for which he immediately chided himself, stretched out his own to arrest her. But David, without looking up from his writing, said

gently: “Let her call up whom she will.” And Lady Lochore demanded Mrs. Nutmeg’s appearance.

“My friends,” she added, after a spell of brooding silence, once more addressing her brother, “have been so summarily turned out of this house that their immediate evidence is unobtainable. A letter to Bath, however, would produce their attendance or their answer by writing if——”

But at this point Margery knocked at the door. Slowly Sir David looked up:

“I may as well tell you at once,” said he, “that were you to fetch witnesses from the four corners of the globe, there is but one person’s word which I would be willing to take in this matter—and hers I do not intend to ask for.”

The rector gazed in astonishment upon the determined speaker. This confidence, he thought, showed almost like a new phase of eccentricity; it was as exaggerated in its way as the previous universal distrust of humanity and more likely to be followed by a reaction. Sir David had but shortly before informed him that since the moment when he had received the sleeping draught from Ellinor’s hand, he had not met her. His attitude seemed the more inexplicable. But Dr. Tutterville was now all anxious to clear up this strange matter; for, since Lady Lochore’s excited entrance upon the scene, he had become convinced that Ellinor was the victim of some cunning conspiracy, and was increasingly ashamed of his own previous misgivings.

“Nay, David,” he cried, interposing sudden authority, “that is not fair to Mrs. Marvel. She must have the opportunity of self-vindication; she must be urged to speak that word which we indeed do not need, but without which, slanderous tongues will continue to wag. See, yonder she goes,” he added, pointing through the window.

David then, without a word, rose and went to the open casement; he beckoned and called:

“Ellinor! Can you come to me?”

Margery Nutmeg took a few humble steps aside and remained in a shadowy corner.

# BOOK III — CHAPTER XVIII GONE LIKE A DREAM

CHAPTER XVIII GONE LIKE A DREAM

... My sweet dream Fell into nothing. Ah, my sighs, my tears, My clenched hands;—for, lo! the poppies hung Dew-dabbled on their stalk, the ousel sung A heavy ditty, and the sullen day Had chidden herald Hesperus away With leaden looks. —KEATS (*Endymion*).

Ellinor entered the room.

“The heartless wretch!” thought Lady Lochore, with the marvellous inconsequence of hatred, “her old father lying dead and she in all these colours!”

But the next glance showed her that the only colours Ellinor wore were those that cannot be doffed at will—gold of hair, rose of cheek, blue of eye and dazzling white of throat. The flower had opened wide to the sun of great love! The presence of death itself cannot rob the living thing of the beauty of its destined hour.

Ellinor’s arms, moreover, were full of branching leaves and strange blossoms. She had had the womanly thought to lay upon her father’s body a wreath made of the plants he had loved. Purple and mauve, crimson and orange, with foliage of many greens, it was a sheaf of rich hues she held against her black dress; and she seemed to bring with her into the room all the breath of the Herb-Garden and all its imprisoned sunshine.

She had walked straight in, seeking and seeing no one but David. He was still standing and, as she halted he moved nearer to her. For a while they were silent, gazing on each other. And her beauty seemed to grow into

brighter and brighter radiance.—Every woman is a goddess once at least in her life. But Ellinor stood upon her Olympian height but for a short moment.

“Mrs. Marvel!”

At the first sound of Lady Lochore’s voice, at the sight of Margery’s face, she fell from her pinnacle, suddenly and piteously. Why were these, her enemies, here, and why had she been convened into their presence? Why did the rector sit there like a judge and wear that uneasy countenance? Her brain whirled. It could fasten on no settled thought. But in the great crisis of life what woman trusts to thought when she can feel! Ellinor felt:—this bodes evil! Yet David had looked at her with beautiful eyes of faith and gladness. Her fate was in his hands, what then had she to fear? She turned her glance again upon him. In spite of her boding heart she trusted.

“Mrs. Marvel,” said Lady Lochore. “I have considered it my duty to speak to my brother on the subject of the painful episode of the other night.”

Ellinor crimsoned to the roots of her hair, to the tips of her fingers. She dropped her eyes. Yet in the midst of all the agony of woman’s modesty outraged before the man she loved, there remained a deep sweetness of anticipation in her heart. She waited, motionless, for the touch of his hand, the sound of his voice that should proclaim her his bride. She waited. The silence enveloped her like a pall. Lady Lochore laughed and the blood rushed back to Ellinor’s heart.

“David!”

There was everything in that cry, everything in the look she cast upon him, to appeal to a man’s chivalry, to his honour, to his love: the pride of the innocent woman, the reproach of the wronged woman, the trust of the loving woman. And David spoke:

“You need say nothing, Ellinor, need not condescend to answer.”

Alas, what vindication was this!

“Does Mrs. Marvel deny then,” resumed Lady Lochore, “that she was discovered two nights ago——”

David lifted his hand and his voice in a superb unison of anger:

“Be silent. It is I who deny it! And let that suffice!” Then he went on rapidly, with more self-control yet still vibrating with indignation: “I know this to be a base lie, an iniquitous conspiracy. Your motives, my poor sister, are but too obvious! Your treatment of our kinswoman who has brought comfort and gladness to my house, has been odious from the first moment of your uninvited presence here. This is the climax! Now hear my last word:—not only is Mrs. Marvel, as I know her, incapable of desecrating the hospitality she honours me by accepting, but she is incapable of harbouring an unworthy thought.”

David’s countenance was lit by every generous impulse. Yet each vindicating word fell upon Ellinor’s ear like the sounds of her death sentence—death to both honour and happiness! A chasm was opening before her feet, the depths of which she could not yet fathom. One thing alone was dawning upon her moment by moment, with more inexorable light—*David did not know! All this had been but a dream to him.* And even as a dream he remembered nothing. *He did not remember!* Unconsciously she repeated to herself, even as Lady Lochore awhile before: *Madness and then sleep!* He knew nothing of his own vows of love to her, he knew nothing of his own words of passion! *He did not know; and her lips were sealed!*

At first Lady Lochore wondered whether David were playing a deep and subtle game; whether the two were in collusion. But a glance from his transfigured countenance to Ellinor’s stricken look, the sight of the rector’s evident perturbation, her own knowledge of the crystal truth of

her brother's character, promptly dispelled the doubt. The game was hers!

"All well and good," said she. "Your cavalier attitude, most romantic David, is fit to grace the pages of the latest Scotch novel! But allow me to point out that it will not pass current in the every day world. Besides the fact that these eyes of mine and those of my friends beheld a scene in Mrs. Marvel's room the like of which our honourable house never sheltered before, Margery Nutmeg can tell you how she heard an adventurous climber mount to Mrs. Marvel's window. How Joyce, your head-keeper, met Colonel Harcourt, skulking through the park at midnight—"

Dr. Tutterville started. David made no movement, but something in his very stillness showed that the words had struck him.

"Mr. Villars, again, could have informed you, how he came upon Mr. Herrick and Colonel Harcourt brawling on the bridge an hour later, both in torn garments and as highly incensed one against the other, as only rivals——"

"Needless, all this," said Ellinor, in a low clear voice. She had flung back her head and stood, white as death, but composed, holding herself as proudly as a queen. "I deny nothing. It would be useless to deny, did I wish it, what Lady Lochore and her friends and Mrs. Nutmeg have seen for themselves." She paused, then resumed, gaining firmness in voice and manner: "I give you the truth, in so far as I am myself concerned. Judge of me as you will. Barnaby escaped from his room after my father had locked him up, climbed up to my window, where I let him in—"

"Barnaby," exclaimed the parson with a loud burst of relieved laughter. "'Pon my word, a pretty storm in a tea-cup, Maud Lochore!"

Lady Lochore grew grey, save for the bloody fingerprint of death upon either cheek.

“And was it Barnaby,” she hissed, “whom you covered with your cloak, to hide him from our eyes?”

Ellinor flung a glance of a sad, yet lovely self-abnegation upon David before she answered:

“No, it was not Barnaby.”

For all its melancholy ring of renunciation the word could not have fallen from her lips in a tone of more exquisite sweetness had it been an avowal of love in the ear of the only one who had a right to demand it. The love that makes the willing martyr, as well as the pride that can face ignominy, had enabled her to surmount the failing of her heart over this bitterness. Was she not bound to silence by a thousand shackles of loyalty, of woman’s reticence, of elementary delicacy, of love for him? The sacrifice was for him. He must never know that it was his madness that had wronged her in the world’s eyes. Her hand could not deal this blow to his fastidious honour. *Moreover, had it not been all a dream?* How did she know that, waking, he could love her as he had loved her in his dream? Nay, his very defence of her, his calmness and freedom from jealousy seemed to her aching heart to argue a mere friendliness incompatible with passion. Thus for herself, too, her pride could endure to stand with tarnished fame before him, but could not stoop to demand the reparation she knew he would so quickly have offered. She went on, steadily ignoring alike the rector’s shocked distress, Lady Lochore’s triumph and Margery’s insolent silence.

“After Barnaby had taken refuge with me—some one, a man, entered my room. He did not know what he was doing. And because of that I shall never tell his name.”

Lady Lochore quailed before the high soul and generous heart of the woman she was ruining; and quailing, abashed, shamed in her own tempest-tossed desperate nature, hated her but the more.

The poor rector clacked his tongue aloud in dismay, chiding himself for his over-zeal. He had meant to straighten matters, and, lo, they were more inextricably knotted than ever! Here was a mystery to which he had not the beginning of a clue. No man of his mind and heart could look upon Ellinor and deem her a wanton as she now stood; and yet both her self-accusation and her reticence proclaimed how deeply she must love the unknown man she could thus shield with her own honour. Was this the end of all their fond secret hopes for Bindon!

Now David gazed at Ellinor almost as if the old dream-palsy had returned upon him. As in a dream, too, he seemed to see again some past picture which had foretold this hour. Thus on the first day of her return to Bindon had he seen her pass from sunshine and colour and brilliancy into darkness; seen the goddess turn to a pale woman in a black dress. Was this what his house had brought upon her!

His eyes dilated with pity, his whole being seemed to become broken by pity, given over to pity, till, for the moment, there was no room for any other feeling. Pity of the man for the woman, of the strong for the weak. He sank back into his seat and shaded his eyes with his hand. He could not look upon that high golden head abased.

But Ellinor had lost little of her proud bearing. Love is royalty, and royalty can walk to the scaffold as if to the throne.

“I cannot think,” she said with a pale smile, “that Lady Lochore can have any further need of my testimony.”

“Stay, stay!” cried Dr. Tutterville. “There is more in this than meets the eye. Ellinor, you have let yourself be caught in some cunning trap!”

“Uncle Horatio,” answered she, “you are right. Yes, things are not as you think.”

And upon this enigmatic phrase she left them.

Lady Lochore went straight up to her child. She told herself she was extraordinarily happy. She had been providentially saved from fratricide and yet had encompassed her end:—Ellinor's position at Bindon had at last been rendered untenable. And her boy's inheritance was safe! She hugged him, teased him, rollicked with him till he shrieked with joy. But for all that her heart was well-nigh as heavy within her as it had been upon her awakening; if she had not her brother's death on her conscience, it could not acquit her of all share in Master Simon's sudden end. David and he had shared the same cup—that was servant's talk all through the house. And how much did Margery know? That inscrutable woman was now at her elbow; and the sleek and meaning words that fell from her lips, the very feeling of her shadowy presence irritated the guilty woman almost beyond bounds. Yet she could not, dared not, dismiss this Margery.

David lifted a grave face from his shielding hands, looked at Dr. Tutterville and then, arrested by a gesture the words brimming on the elder man's lips:

"Hush! Do not let us discuss this now."

The parson, wondering, saw him sort his papers and lay them aside, then ring the bell, and again send for Margery. Sir David looked at her for a brief moment as she stood before him apparently wrapt in her usual smug composure, but, by the twitching of her hands and the furtive working of her lips, betraying some hidden agitation.

"Margery Nutmeg," said her master then, "in an hour you leave my house and my service." A sudden livid fury came over the woman's face. But David's gesture, his determined speech bore down the inarticulate protest that broke from her. "It is useless to attempt to make me alter my decision. I know how you have considered me bound by promise to your husband, and how you have traded upon it. That promise, in so far as I consider it binding, I shall keep till you die. You shall receive fit and

sufficient maintenance from me. But in my house or upon my estate you shall dwell no more." He dismissed her with a wave of the hand, merely adding: "If you present yourself at the bailiffs office in an hour, you will receive your money. Go!"

And Margery went, without another word.

"Ah, David," said the reverend Horatio admiringly, "had you but done this earlier!" And in his heart was the thought, based upon too unsubstantial ground to put it into words: "Then things would surely not stand now at this pass!"

Sir David made no reply. He did not even seem to hear. He was seated at his writing table, inditing a letter of reply to Colonel Harcourt's friend. As he wrote, the crimson of a deep, slow-burning resentment mounted to his face.

Lady Lochore's enforced departure fitted in well enough in her mind with the new turn of events. Now that Master Simon was dead, Ellinor's residence at Bindon became an impossibility so soon as she herself had gone. To be sure Madam Tutterville might give her niece harbourage; but Lady Lochore was quite satisfied that if she had failed to convince the rector of Mrs. Marvel's frailty the rector's wife had been more easy to deal with. Therefore she hurried on her preparations with a sick desire to escape from surroundings charged with such ugly memories. Even as the four horses drew the travelling chaise up to the door she stood ready in the hall, feverishly hustling her servants.

Sir David was there too, attentive to speed his sister's parting, but certes, with even less warmth than he had welcomed her arrival. She spoke her bitterly sarcastic word of thanks. He answered by the cold wish that her health might have been benefited, according to her hopes, by her visit to her home of old. This time even the kiss upon the hand was omitted. But

as he was leading her across the threshold, her mood changed hysterically:

“David,” said she, in a panting whisper, “oh, no, you cannot let me go like this! Some day you’ll thank me for having saved you ... for you are saved a second time.” She could not keep the taunt out of her mouth. “After all, I am your only sister, and this is the last time we shall ever meet. I am dying!”

“My only sister died to me ten years ago,” said David. His tone was quite unmoved; and he added, almost in the same breath: “There is a high wind rising, you had better wrap your cloak over your mouth.”

She struck away in fury the hand that held hers, ran down the steps alone, and sprang into the carriage, where, seizing the child, she held him up at the window in a sort of vengeful mute defiance that, louder than any shriek, spoke her secret meaning: “Fool, you shall not keep this hated flesh and blood from ruling in your place some day!”

As the wheels began to crunch round in the gravel, she suddenly became aware of a dull grey face and black eyes looking upon her out of the shade of the opposite seat. It was not her maid! A shudder ran through her frame. She stared without speaking.

But Margery’s voice was silky as ever:

“Asking your pardon, my lady, I made so bold. Mamselle Josephine is in the other coach. Sir David has dismissed me. But I knew your ladyship would offer me a home and welcome, seeing that it is my devotion to your ladyship that’s lost me my bread and my station in my old age. I made so bold,” repeated Mrs. Nutmeg, and the veiled threat was all the more awful to the listener because of the unemotional tone, “knowing your ladyship’s heart as I know it.”

“Mamma,” cried the spoilt child, “let me go! I don’t like your cold hands!”

And thus, with Nemesis by her side, Lady Lochore left Bindon-Cheveral for the last time, and drove through the gathering storm on her speedy way to die Valley of the Shadows.

Ellinor took her last look at her father’s face and laid the wreath of herbs at his feet and a sprig of his Euphrosinum, fatal plant! upon his breast.

Madam Tutterville, in wifely solicitude for her Horatio’s unphilosophic depression, had insisted on his returning with her to the rectory. Without her, Ellinor could not remain at Bindon. But even had it not been so, to abide as David’s guest would have been the one thing to render her trouble unbearable. And there was nothing in the last cruel details that precede the returning of earth to earth to make her desire to linger in the death-chamber. She, therefore, accepted her aunt Sophia’s offer of hospitality. Had she not been all absorbed in her own troubles the lady’s altered manner, and the rebuffingly Christian spirit in which the invitation was offered, might have struck her painfully. But she was past noticing such things.

The falling dusk of that miserable day found her at the door of the tower-wing, Barnaby at her side loaded with her modest baggage, Belphegor ruffled and protesting under her arm. She was dry-eyed: there is an arid misery the desolation of which no well-spring can relieve. In this silent company she sallied out.

A dumb boy, and a cat! After these months of full life, after her gorgeous dream of happiness—this was all that was left her. The road that had opened before her, alluring, fantastic almost in its promise, had led to this desolation.

The Star-Dreamer sat by the open coffin in the laboratory, his head bent, his hands clasped upon his knees, holding between them the sprig of the

Euphrosinum which he had absently taken from the heap of wild flowers that lay on his old friend's breast. He was absorbed in thought.

A great silence was in the room erstwhile so filled with a thousand minute sounds of restless energy. Extinct the hearth; extinct the furnace which for over twenty years had glowed night and day; mute all the little voices, cold the matras and crucibles, all as silent and as cold, as extinguished as the once eager brain of their master. But the watcher's mind was seething with keen thoughts, busy sorrows. He had lost her—she was gone! She who had come like a lovely vision to this house when it was held as under a spell of twilight dreaming; who had reanimated it with her own life; who had brought, as she had promised, sunshine into its dusk, fresh air into its stagnation, sweetness where the must had lain; she was gone from his sweet hopes, gone in sorrow and shame! Her bright head dimmed as even now was his star under the clouds that were gathering thick and thicker with the brooding storm.

And he, the Star-Dreamer? He had been called back from his unnatural life of solitude, step by step had been brought down from his height, had been taught once more to see the fairness of earth, had been made to feel the desire of the eyes, to hear the cry of his forgotten manhood: all to the end of this vault, this chamber of death, this knowledge of loss. Yet, no! She had once said to him in an unforgettable hour: "Sometimes a harboured sorrow is only fancied, not real; and it may be that real adversity must come to make us see it." And now he felt that she had been right. His reawakened virility was strong within him. True, he had for a second time, and in middle life, been struck to the heart; yet, strange working of Fate! the new sorrow seemed not only to drive away the last remnant of the old, but actually to strengthen and arm him again for the fight of life. Although from his long sleep he had carried forth no conscious memory of a dream, that hour spent in Ellinor's room when, in the body's weakness, his spirit had come so close to hers, had left an ineffaceable stamp upon his mind. He had asked her, in trouble: "Can I

trust you?" She had answered him: "To the death," and he had believed. And now, though he had seen her stand self-accused before him, he believed still.

The crisis often heralds the cure. He was cured of his strange palsy of mind, of his infirmity of purpose, of his sick melancholy. He was a fighting man again in a world where everything must be fought for, above all things happiness. Cured—aye, but too late! She, the joy he might but a few weeks before have taken for his own, she had passed from his gates.

Cured, made strong again.... How? By what? In that soothing draught, of whose nature he had known nothing, but which her own hand had prepared, had she steeped a branch of that wondrous plant which held so many unknown properties? Had that given him a new life and sanity while it had brought death or madness to others? Ah, no! The transformation was her own doing. She had found him weak and ignorant of the one beauty of life, and left him strong, awakened. Awakened, but desolate.

# BOOK III — CHAPTER XIX GREY DEPARTURE

## CHAPTER XIX GREY DEPARTURE

Here then she comes.—I'll have a bout with thee: Devil, or devil's dam!... Blood will I draw on thee—thou art a witch! And straightway give thy soul to him thou serv'st! —SHAKESPEARE (*Henry VI.*)

The next morning, at an hour unwontedly early for such a ceremony, they laid Master Simon's remains to rest in the family vault. The discontent in the village, aroused by the series of mishaps attendant on the simpler's last experiments and fostered of late by Margery's subtle calumnies, had been fanned to fury by her last round of farewell visits. The death of the warlock himself had little effect in assuaging the new-risen hatred which now was aimed at his living daughter.

It was a morning of weeping skies; a fine rain-shroud enveloped the land; Bindon looked desolate enough to be mourning a mightier scion than this poor eccentric old child. The creepers clung to the tower and the ruins, like sodden garments. The blurred panes looked like tear-dimmed eyes. The dripping flag of Bindon-Cheveral hung at half-mast, so limp and darkened with wet that it might have been a funeral scarf.

The ceremonial was performed before a congregation pitiable in its tenuity. Beyond the sexton, the clerk, old Giles and sobbing Barnaby, not another human being escorted the dead student to his last home, save the narrow circle of his own kinsfolk. Not one of the many he had helped in life, or of the many he had healed, could remember his debt of gratitude, so little did the many lives he had saved weigh against those few he had lost.

Good Doctor Tutterville officiated with something less than his usual dignity. He was painfully distracted. There were two or three raw graves yawning, without, in the little wet churchyard, that felt to his kind heart as if they had been dug into it. He was anxious too; his ear was strained for the dreaded sound of angry voices breaking in upon the sanctity of his dead. The words of the solemn service escaped his lips in haste, and he breathed a sigh of relief when at last the great stone was rolled back into its place and, the keys being returned to his own possession, he knew his old friend's remains were safe from desecration.

When he emerged from the vestry with David beside him, both instinctively looked round for Ellinor. But she was gone, and Madam Tutterville, her round face for once the image of dissatisfaction, could or would give them no information on the subject. Her high nostril and short answer quite sufficiently indicated that she regarded Ellinor's departure and their curiosity concerning it as equally unbecoming.

"No doubt you will find her at the rectory, if you wish," she remarked with a snort.

But here old Giles, who had betaken his way back to the House—the thought of his restored keys and the comfort of a glowing glass on such a morning luring him to a sort of shuffling trot—returned hastily to the church, emotion of a very different kind lending speed to his clogged limbs:

"They were up at the house," he explained, panting, "a score of them, and even more on the way! They were in the Herb-Garden; they had sworn to leave standing neither stick nor leaf! They had broken into Master Simon's laboratory, laying about them like mad! They meant to leave no bottle or powders of the sorcerer to poison any more of them!"

Sir David and the rector looked at each other as the same thought flashed into each brain: Ellinor!

Then they started off running. It was a fearful possibility that the daughter might have returned to either of her father's haunts; and the thought of the danger to which she was exposed amid an angry, ignorant rabble was hardly to be framed in words.

But Ellinor had had but little time to bestow on the sensibility of grief.

An interview which her aunt had inflicted upon her the previous night had taught her that the last day's events had left her poorer even than she had reckoned. Her hope had been to find a few days' harbourage in the rectory and the counsel of friends, before sailing further on the bitter waters of life. She had hoped—God knows what a woman will hope, so long as she is in the neighbourhood of her beloved! But Madam Tutterville's very first words had called her pride in arms.

The lady had gathered good store of awful texts and apposite instances wherewith to lace her discourse; and before a tithe of them had been delivered, Ellinor, scarlet-faced and writhing, had felt herself sullied in all her chastest instincts by the mere fact of listening.

Madam Tutterville looked upon this case as well within her competence: she had not consulted with her lord. But her self-sufficiency overreached her purpose. It was little likely that her pragmatic methods should have extracted the humble and full confession from her niece which seemed to be demanded by every authority, old or new, even had the young widow's steadfastness been less complete than it was.

Above the turmoil of Ellinor's emotions one thing soon became clear: not an hour longer than possible could she remain under this roof. The bread of Madam Tutterville would stick in her throat. The cold charity of strangers would be sweet compared with the bounty of one that could think so meanly of her own kin. Ellinor was indignant, Madam Tutterville severe; so true it is that where most the human of all feelings

is concerned, the best and most tender-hearted woman seems suddenly merciless. They parted in anger.

Early then, on this most gloomy day, had Ellinor taken all her measures. Her available funds were small, but she had saved enough from those limited stores which her father had handed over to her to provide for the immediate future. She had, besides, the capital of splendid health, of indomitable will and energy; so that, for her modest material needs Ellinor Marvel, though now a poor woman once more, had no anxiety. But, oh, for the needs of her heart—that passionate awakened heart that had learned to want so much! It was worse than death to have to tear herself from Bindon.

Nevertheless, unfalteringly, with the secrecy of one who will not be prevented, she considered and carried out her plans. A place was privately retained on the Bath and Devizes coach which passed every morning before the gates of Bindon. Her few garments were gathered and packed. A letter to the rector was left to be delivered after her departure. It briefly stated that she felt it impossible to remain at Bindon, and promised to communicate with him later on.

Unnoticed, she slipped away through the shadows of the little church; and after consigning her small effects to Barnaby (and picking up, on a sudden tender thought of her father, the anxious Belphegor) she struck across the wet grass towards the park entrance, followed by the dismal tolling of the Bindon church bell.

The hood of her cloak pulled over her face, its folds wrapped round her, she sped through the misting rain, so plunged in thought as scarcely to notice, until within a few paces, the knot of village folk advancing up the avenue.

Then she halted, unpleasantly struck by something strange and threatening in their demeanour. They were coming along at a great rate,

like people belated, talking eagerly among themselves, and with fierce gesture. There were some eight or ten of them: an elderly man with a long draggled streamer of black crape tied to a bludgeon, a couple of lanky lads fighting over the possession of a pitchfork, and the rest women, one of whom dragged a child by the hand.

Upon the instant that Ellinor and Barnaby halted they were recognised, and a shout went up that made her blood run cold. The next moment she was surrounded, and the words of execration hurled at her fell with almost as stunning effect as the blows they seemed to presage.

“Witch! Poisoner! Murderer of poor people! She’s trying to run away! It was she planted the poison bush: burn her with a faggot of it! She’s in league with the Devil, and that’s the Devil’s imp. The witch and her boy! Seize her, duck her!”

Angry hands were outstretched, and Ellinor, with energies suddenly restored by the realisation of danger, stepped back against one of the mighty beeches, holding out the wide cloak to shield Barnaby. A new howl broke out at the sight of her burden.

“The witch and her cat! Burn her! Burn them!”

“Give me back my wife!” cried the man with the bludgeon.

“And where’s good Mrs. Nutmeg?” shrieked an old hag.

“See, Jamesie,” exclaimed the woman with the child, “spit upon her! It is she who bewitched your poor daddy!”

The child hurled a stone which fell short of its aim. This was the signal for the passage from anger to frenzy; and it would have fared ill with Master Simon’s three innocent associates, had not it been for an unexpected aid. Barnaby’s face was already streaming with blood, and Ellinor had received on her arm a vicious blow—which Jamesie’s mother, armed with a flint, had levelled at Belphegor—when the sound

of an authoritative shout produced a sudden halt. The sight of the keeper, advancing at full run from his gate-lodge and significantly handling his gun, immediately altered the complexion of affairs. Yet he had not come a moment too soon, nor was there one to be lost; for already a few stragglers, drunk with the triumph of destruction, were running down the avenue towards them from the Herb-Garden.

“Stand back!” cried the keeper. “Stand back, John Mossmason, or I’ll plug you! And you, Joe Barnwall, if you don’t drop that pitchfork you’ll never dig a turnip again, or my name is not keeper!”

The broad cord-clad back was now between Ellinor and her foes. Keeping his barrels levelled at the rioters, he whispered to her over his shoulder:

“Run, ma’am, run and get into the lodge!”

At that instant the note of the post-horn rang out upon the air; the Bath and Devizes coach was passing through the village.

The younger of the two discontented gentlemen who occupied damp outside seats on the coach that day and had been looking forth in dudgeon upon a world of dudgeon, never ceased in after years to recall the tale of that ride as one fit for walnuts and wine.

“It was raining cats and dogs, and by ill-luck (as I thought then), I and an elderly old buck had to put up with outsides: it was packed inside. Well, sir, I was cursing pretty freely by the time we were drawing Devizes. And when the coachman said he had to pick up a passenger at the gates of Bindon-Cheveral, I was getting a curse out of that, for an irregularity—when, gad, the words died on my tongue!

“A woman, sir, the loveliest woman these eyes were ever laid upon (my good lady is not here, I can say it in your ear), running, running for her life, bare-headed in the rain! By George, that was hair worth gazing at!

She held a cat in her arms, like a baby, her cloak, half-torn from her back, flying behind. She was making for our coach. After her, an overgrown gawk of a lad, with a bloody sconce, lugging her bundles anyhow, the most frightened hare of a fellow it has ever been my lot to see—turned out afterwards, to be a kind of natural, deaf and dumb. But she, gad! she was brave for both! A grand creature, 'pon my word! Inside the park there was a prodigious deal of shouting and scuffling, and two or three big devils with pitchforks yelling something about a witch.

"'Pray, gentlemen,' says she, looking up at us, her eyes as blue as forget-me-nots, her face as white as this napkin, but as calm as you or I, 'help me up,' says she, 'or they will kill me.' And would you believe, it, she hands the cat up first before she'd let any one extend a hand to her? And the boy, he must come too! 'I can't leave him behind,' says she, 'they would tear him to pieces.' And, zounds, sir, if it had not been for a keeper fellow with a gun who ran up and locked the wicket gate in their very faces, some of those lads meant murder or I never saw it written on a human face. Then it was: 'On with you John!' Off went the horn. Off went we, the inside females screeching like mad, and the devils at the gate bellowing like wild beasts after their prey....

"'Well, this is a rum go!' says the coachman, as he tucks the cat between his boots. 'I always thought this here place of the Cheverals was asleep; dang me if it hasn't wakened up with a vengeance!'

"A witch, sir, they'd called her. Not so far wrong there! Between you and me and the bottle I've never been able to forget her. A strange creature—all the women I've known would have gone off in a screaming fit or a swoon. Not she. The first thing she does is to whip open one of her little bundles and out with her handkerchief, and wipe and bind the boy's broken head as he squatted beside her; and then she turns to me on the other side and hands me a scarf, and says she: 'Would I be so kind as to tie it round her arm, as tight as might be.' And then I saw an ugly gash

in the pretty white flesh. ‘A hit with a stone,’ she says. And not another word could I get, nor the other old boy (who was green with jealousy at her speaking with me), nor John the coachman, though he called her ‘my dear,’ and was as round as round with her, a fatherly sort of man that any young female might confide in.

“She just pulled her hood over her face and lay back folding her arms, the sound one over the hurt one, and sat staring at the gray wet walls of Cheveral park as we skirted them. Her face looked like a white rose in the black shadow, and by and by, I saw the great tears begin to gather and roll down her cheeks one by one. I tell you, sir, my heart’s not a particularly soft one, but it made it ache.

“Well, we set her down and her cat and her boy at York House. She paid the boy’s fare and thanked us. I thought she was going in at the York—but she went up without another word by Bartlett street. And I never saw her again, nor heard more of her story.—Pass the bottle.”

THE STAR DREAMER

# BOOK IV

Haunted by the starry head Of her whose gentle will has changed my faith And made my life a perfumed altar flame. TENNYSON (*Maud*)

# BOOK IV — CHAPTER I AH ME, THE MIGHT-HAVE-BEEN!

CHAPTER I AH ME, THE MIGHT-HAVE-BEEN!

I cry to vacant chairs and widowed walls, My house is left unto me desolate. —TENNYSON (*Aylmer's Field*).

Bindon woods were growing yellow. After an early and glorious summer, rain had set in with much wind and storm, and though it was but the first of September, the country had already begun to don its autumn livery.

Sir David, returning from a devious pilgrimage, rode slowly up the avenue. There was the scent of fallen leaves in the air and the ground beneath the tread of his horse's feet was sodden and spongy. It was a sad and cloudy afternoon, with just now a brief respite between two gusts of wind and rain, a streak of blue in the watery sky above the soaking land. He had come fast and far; his horse was mud-bespattered, his riding-boots discoloured to the knees. Both rider and steed seemed dejected: so comes a man home from fruitless quest.

At the bend of the way, where the rectory walls skirted the avenue, Dr. Tutterville suddenly stood forth. From afar, and with anxious eyes, the parson and the squire scrutinised each other's bearing, and it hardly needed the melancholy greeting:

"No news!"

"No news!" to confirm the impression of failure.

The reverend Horatio had, during the last four weeks of anxiety and fruitless search, lost some of his comfortable rotundity, some of his

placid ease of manner. The iron grey of his hair had lightened a little more towards silver. He laid his hand upon the rider's muddy knee and paced beside him towards the house. After a little silence a melancholy converse began.

"Wherever the poor child may be," said the parson, "at any rate you are satisfied that she has not fallen into the hands either of that evil-living man, Colonel Harcourt, or of that light-spirited youth, Mr. Luke Herrick. That at least should be a consolation."

Yet he sighed as he spoke and looked questioningly at the other. But David's face became still more darkened.

"As I wrote to you," he replied, after a little pause and with a sort of repugnance, "I had Colonel Harcourt's movements closely traced from the moment of his leaving the 'Cheveral Arms' to the moment of our meeting in Richmond Park, and afterwards. Ellinor and he——" He broke off then, with a sudden irritation: "Great God," he cried, "it was infamous to suspect her of favour to that man."

Dr. Tutterville shook his head.

"The best and the purest," said he, "are often and naturally the most easily deluded, David. I suspect her of nothing more than——"

But seeing Sir David wince he did not conclude his phrase. There fell another silence, emphasised by the sucking sound of the horse's hoofs on the moist pathway and the dripping of the leaves over their heads. Then the rector began again plaintively:

"The fair creature had grown into my old heart! Without her Bindon is desolate! At any rate you are satisfied," he repeated in a tone of the most uncomfortable indecision, "and also as regards Mr. Herrick."

Anger began to creep to the rider's brow once more. But he mastered himself and answered calmly enough:

“My dear doctor, I have written all this to you; do not bring me over the weary ground again. Harcourt is now in bed, being nursed for his second wound. I mentioned, did I not, that he had scarce recovered from the ball I left in his shoulder—ah, doctor, I used to have a steadier hand—before he had a second encounter, this time with Mr. Herrick.”

“I confess,” said the parson, with a melancholy shake of the head, “that it is precisely this second meeting which reawakened all my doubts. You know I had never been disposed to consider Colonel Harcourt seriously in the matter, deeming it so much more probable that Ellinor should have been attracted by the younger gentleman. And I had most earnestly trusted that, the latter being (or I am no judge of character) an honest-hearted youth, affairs were by no means past remedy.”

“You are right,” answered David, “Mr. Herrick is an honourable man. I saw him the day before his meeting with Harcourt. What passed between us is sacred to both. Suffice it: I am satisfied.”

The parson sighed and again shook his head.

“Satisfied!” he echoed. “Would I could feel satisfied about the welfare of that poor child; nay, about any one detail of the whole incredible business! At first I could have sworn.... You see, since her flight all my theories are upset. There is only one thing clear, and that is the emptiness of our lives without her!”

Thereupon the younger man’s passion burst forth. He struck the saddle bow with his clenched hand:

“In Heaven’s name, spare me any more of this! My God, man, do you not think I feel it at least as much as you? If she had grown into your heart, how had it been with mine?”

“Forgive me,” interposed the other in alarm at his companion’s vehemence. (Was this the old brain-sick David back again, was the old

story of Bindon House to begin once more?) “Forgive me,” he repeated. “I had no idea....”

“No idea!” The rider looked down upon his companion with a bitter smile. “And did I not hear you boast, but a moment ago, that you could read the human countenance? No idea that I loved Ellinor! Why, man, have I not loved her since the first instant these eyes beheld her, ah, me, nearly a year ago! with the lamplight shining on her golden head! And her blue eyes—her blue eyes!”

With the inexplicable shyness of the man for his fellow-human, the parson almost recoiled from the vision of passion unexpectedly laid bare before him. But like those mountain-chasms filled with mist to the wayfarer’s eye, save when a rare and sudden gust of wind allows their depth to be fathomed for a moment, the deeps of Sir David’s heart were swiftly veiled again. He resumed the thread of his thought, in a composed manner, though somewhat dreamily, as if speaking to himself rather than to a listener:

“I came down that first night from my tower, I remember, eyes and mind dazed by the glory of that new star which I was so inordinately elated at having been the first to see, and I thought,” with a little laugh at once tender and exceedingly melancholy, “that another miracle—I was in the mood for miracles—had been wrought for me, and that the star in the firmament had taken living shape on earth!”

“In the name of goodness, what prevented you from telling her so then!” exclaimed the parson with sudden testiness. “Aye, David, and sparing us all this sorrow? You could have won her easily enough.”

“Because I was mad, I suppose. Oh, my dear old friend, never protest! I am sane again now, sane enough at least to know how mad I have been—call it by what euphemistic name you like. I might have won her, but did not know myself, could not trust myself. I believed I had done

with human love, you know. I had consecrated myself to worlds beyond this one. She came to call me down from my unnatural life. She spoke to me, with sweet human voice, of lovely human things; she laid her tender hand on mine. It was my madness that I dulled my ears, that I made no answer to her touch. And yet there was happiness, ah, God, what happiness, in it all! Then came that last strange night! What happened to me I cannot recall. But ever since then I have been so sane, that, before God, I could almost wish the old folly back now that I have lost all. The curse of common sense is on me: I can no longer lose myself in visions on my tower. There stands Bindon, my house, my desolate house, an empty shell, full of echoes. Before me lies a desolate, empty life, full of memories. Everything, everything speaks of her, calls for her! Nothing can ever be sweet to me for the want of her. Once she said to me: 'David, David, why is your heart empty, why are there no children round your knee!' And I made answer: 'Never can such things be for me.' And then she wept over me.... You are right, sir, I might have won her. Sometimes, reason notwithstanding, under the pulse of vague, elusive memories I cannot fix, I think that in spite of all she loved me."

The parson started again and flung an apprehensive glance at the speaker. The latter noted it; and the cold desolation of his voice changed for a light tone of irony that was somehow quite as melancholy:

"But never fear, dear sir, this is no return of madness. Who can fathom a woman's heart? All lies shrouded in mystery and, as you say, we know but one thing:—that we have lost her!"

"Strange is it not?" began David once more, "that I should remember so clearly every word she ever said to me, though my poor brain was so sick at the time! But indeed it seems to me as if, until the moment when first a mantle of gorgeous dream enwrapt me round and then a blank, a blessed blank fell on me and in it I lost as in a great sea all the miserable wreckage of my wasted life—it seems to me, I say, as if my illness was

that I remembered too much, too constantly, too vividly, for mental health. And now I remember still, yet not as of old with torture of shame and fury, but as if memories of her were all that life has left of sweetness." He reined in his horse, and, gazing straight before him as at the rift of blue between the heavy clouds, went on still dreamily: "Strange, does it not seem to you? Strange even to myself! And I who could not trust her, when her every look and smile was for me, now I trust her, although, standing before us all, she would not defend her woman's fame by one word."

They had reached the bridge that led across the moat to the yards. Here David, having hailed a stableman from a distance, dismounted and delivered over his horse.

"Give me your arm, doctor," said he, "I am stiff from the saddle and cold from my thoughts. I dread the going in; let us prolong our way sufficiently to put my dull blood in movement again. Yes, my kind old friend," he went on, in answer to a shrewd look, "it is even so; I dread the moment of crossing my threshold where there is nought to greet us but whispers of the might-have-been."

"Man was never meant to live alone," said Tutterville sententiously. "How often have I not told you so?"

Leaning on the parson's arm, David impelled him towards the narrow path that led to the fateful Herb-Garden. The wind had risen again; a rainstorm was impending. Overhead the branches were shaken as by an angry capricious hand; shreds of green foliage, and now and then an isolated prematurely yellow leaf, fluttered athwart them as they went.

Sir David halted with a start as they came into the open space under the yew-tree. Where the ancient gateway had, with delicate curvet and strength of iron, guarded the forbidden close, was now a gap, ugly as a wound, beyond which the stretch of devastated garden lay raw to the

gaze. Against the broken-down wall the useless unhinged doors lay propped.

“I have had nothing done to this place since you left,” said the rector, breaking the heavy pause. “I thought that perhaps your wish would coincide with mine; that you would give orders to have these precincts cleared and levelled, and thrown in with the rest of the grounds, so that even its unhappy memory might die out among us. Over those new graves in the churchyard the sod is growing green again; and in the hearts of our poor ignorant village folk, resignation to the will of Providence, and repentance and shame for their cowardly turbulence, has taken the place of all angry feelings. I may tell you now, David, how grateful they all are for your not pursuing them with punishment.”

“Pah!” interrupted Sir David with impatient contempt. “What were the wretches to me—since I had heard she had escaped! What care I but to find her again!”

The parson halted disconcerted. Sir David had abruptly left his side to walk rapidly up to the gates and examine them. Then he turned. His look and demeanour had something of the singularity of former days. And from his distance:

“Rase these walls!” he cried. “Sweep these memories!... Have I not just said to you that memory is all that I have left! This wall shall be built up, these gates hung again; and no hand but mine shall touch what remains of those beds that she tended and planted. No feet but mine shall tread the paths her feet have pressed. Here shall all lie as secret and desolate as my life without her.—Let us go!”

Worthy Dr. Tutterville walked on in silence. His warm heart was too sincerely grieved for his eccentric companion to resent his present attitude; at the same time he was conscious of a humanly-irritated regret that the present form of eccentricity should not have manifested itself a

little earlier. Presently Sir David took up the thread of the conversation where the rector had left it.

“So your good parishioners are grateful for my indulgence,” he said, with something approaching a sneer. “Let them thank the Providence to whom, as you tell me, they are beginning to be resigned, that He protected the object of their hatred from them! Had I not received the keeper’s word that she was safe and sound, I would have left no stone unturned to make every scoundrel of them know the full penalties of the law touching assault and housebreaking. They complained of poison ... they would have learned something of gallows! But their offence to me was not worth the trouble their punishment would entail. She escaped—let them be!”

“These are hard words,” said the parson disturbed, and he was about to add all the excuses he had already found for his flock in the trouble they had themselves endured and in the evil influence of Margery among them, when David interrupted again:

“I am a hard man, it seems! Well, I need be, to endure life.”

And Dr. Tutterville wisely held his peace.

The two friends proceeded towards Bindon House in silence. The reverend Horatio was now pondering over certain phrases of David’s which seemed ever and again, like the lightning that on a dark night flashes out upon the bewildered wayfarer, one instant to show him the road, only to leave him the next hopelessly groping in the mire.

“If she had grown into your heart, how had it been with mine!... Why, man, I have loved her since the first instant! First I was wrapt in gorgeous dreams, and then there came the blank. Then came the blank—then came the *blank*.” The phrase recurred, with meaning insistence like the burden of a catch. Presently he gave a kind of start. If he dared but connect these

flashes! If he but dared hazard his unsteady steps upon the astonishing road they seemed to reveal! But he kept his peace.

In spirit David was back in the Herb-Garden, not the poor, dishonoured, bruised place upon which he had just turned his back, but the garden of that wondrous dawn where he and Ellinor had wandered into such a lovely land. He yearned for the moment when the guardian gates should be erect once more and the key of them within his hand.—Therein, as a man locks up the casket that holds the faded flowers, the crushed letters, all that fate has left him of his love, would he hold close for evermore the tenderest memory of his life.

# BOOK IV — CHAPTER II A MESSENGER OF GLAD TIDINGS

## CHAPTER II A MESSENGER OF GLAD TIDINGS

Oh, my love, my breath of life, where art thou! —KEATS (*Endymion*).

Sir David turned into the library and flung himself into a chair with a sigh that was almost a groan. And Dr. Tutterville could have echoed it as he looked round:—the ghosts that Ellinor had chased had all returned with the dust on the window-pane, with the dead flowers in the bowl, with the stagnant atmosphere of a fireless unaired room. The very books seemed to have lost their souls, to have become but matter, telling of nought but the futility of all things. Dimness and desolation brooded again over the house.

The parson tried to pump up some consoling phrase, stopped midway, coughed, went to the window and began to tap aimlessly on the pane. A selfish, elderly longing seemed to draw him back towards his own cosy fireside, where no haunting regret had ever quite extinguished the light of sunny Greek or philosophic Latin; where melancholy assumed no sterner guise than the placid analytic countenance of old Burton. He glanced again at the long figure in the chair, now bent in utter weariness, and the inner voice asked anxiously in a whisper: “How long will the new-found sanity last in such conditions as these?”

Into this brooding came a sudden clamour from without. It was the voice of Madam Tutterville calling upon her spouse with every note of impatience and exultation; and a moment later the lady herself appeared in the doorway, panting but radiant.

“Horatio, my dear doctor! Good gracious, man, what are you doing here? I have sought you everywhere as the spouse of the canticle sought the goat. Oh, my goodness, let me sit down and find breath! I have news!”

News! On her entrance, David had drawn himself slowly together with lustreless eye and turned vaguely to greet the new-comer, but her last words brought him to her side with a spring that overtook even his exclamation.

“News!” he echoed. And the two men looked at each other. What could news mean to them but one thing?

Madam Tutterville tottered to a chair, untied her hat-strings, let her hands drop upon her comfortable knees, and turned her eyes from one eager face to the other. Her own full-moon countenance was irradiated with a harvest-like glow. The infantile smile of her best moods was upon her lips.

But woman will remain woman no matter how clothed with superfluous flesh. Sophia positively coquetted with the moment, dallied with her own consciousness of power as complacently as any slim chit of eighteen. She vowed she was tired to death; pettishly requested Horatio not to hang over her: she was hot, she was stifling. She then, in a tone of promising importance, announced that she was back from Bath (for her autumn shopping), and then broke off to stare at David as if she had but just become aware of his presence, and to comment upon his unexpected return with exasperating interest.

“And what news have you brought?” quoth she, with emphasis.

Bitter disappointment set its mark on David’s face.

“Have you found traces of Ellinor?” pursued the lady.

David drew back, shaking his head; but the parson found a different meaning in his wife’s bantering tone. He caught her plump hand.

“Ah, excellent Sophia!” said he. “I might have known you would come to the rescue, as ever! You have heard of the child!”

Madam Tutterville was no longer able to control the tide of her triumph:

“Heard of her? Traced—found her—seen her! But this hour come from her! Have held her in these arms!”

Her voice rose with ever increasing flourish till it broke upon the over-high note.

The next instant she was clasped in her lord’s embrace; and, as she sobbed with joy upon his shoulder, it may be that even the worthy gentleman’s own eyes grew wet. David stood quite still, in that intensity of stillness which cloaks an intensity of emotion. When the worthy couple had recovered from their effusiveness, Madam Tutterville, now with full gusto, began to narrate her story:

“You see, dear Horatio, I could not but feel that you regarded me to blame for poor Ellinor’s flight. And perhaps you are right, doctor, for I fear, in my anxiety, I did indeed fail to observe the scriptural rule that silence is a most excellent thing in woman: A melancholy breach of my usual rule of life——”

“Yes, dear,” said the parson blandly, “and so it was in Bath, Sophia——”

“Pray, my dear doctor, allow me time to speak. I do not mind admitting to you that the expedition to Bath was undertaken less with a view to the store-room (though you did require the Spanish olives), than——” she paused. “There has been a coldness in your eye this past month, Horatio. Oh, yes, my dear doctor, there is no use in denying! And, well, well, I grant you, it was a very sad thing, whatever we might have to reproach her with, to think of that poor young thing cast upon the world. You have always laughed at my presentiments; but, as the prophet says, there are more things in Heaven and earth, Horatio——”

“For God’s sake,” interrupted David suddenly, “this is torture! Where did you see Ellinor? How is she?”

Madam Tutterville started, less at the words than at the tone. She stared a second blankly at the speaker, then meekly replied:

“I found her at Bath. She actually was no further than Bath! In a little lodging. She has been ill, poor dear, but now is strong again. Oh, poor child, she has suffered!”

David turned away. But the parson interposed eagerly:

“And was she alone? Has she told you all?”

Whereat Madam Tutterville was not a little irate.

“Alone, sir—what are you thinking of! I pray you remember, she is my own niece.” She checked herself. “Alone, yes, indeed save for the two dumb things, Belphegor and Barnaby. And as for telling me.... What do you take me for? Do you suppose I should be plaguing her with questions at such a moment? And it’s my belief,” asserted Aunt Sophia energetically, “that she’ll never tell anyone anything. When I as much as hinted again that she might confide in my bosom, she closed her lips and neither man nor mortal could have drawn a word from her; no, not if they had put her on the rack!”

“Singular,” mused the parson. But there was a latent illumination in his eye.

After a while, which was a long while to the impatience of her two hearers, Madam Tutterville had told all she had to tell:

She had traced Ellinor, “in a luminous fashion,” she averred; first by the sight of the unmistakable Belphegor washing his face on the window ledge of a quiet little grey house in a quiet little back street up which Providence (as she piously expressed it), in the shape of a stupid

chairman, had inadvertently led her. So struck was she at the remarkable resemblance to her old cat-acquaintance, she noted in the four-legged philosopher seated among certain dead geraniums, that she had, upon an impulse, arrested her progress. And here (as she took some trouble to point to her spouse) her intelligence had given that effective aid to the designs of Providence, without which the Heavenly Hints would have been thrown away. No sooner had she called a halt than Barnaby himself appeared on the doorstep with a basket on his arm. And after that it was but a short way from the chair to the poor room: and Ellinor was gathered to her arms!

But, to all their questioning, in which indeed it seemed the rector for the most part voiced Sir David's eagerness, beyond the capital fact of the discovery of the truant, Madam Tutterville could give them but little information concerning Ellinor herself; none as to her plans. She had been ill. She was well again. She looked pale, but not sickly; was very silent; refused to come back to the rectory; was in no want, and had prospect of employment. What work and where, she avoided telling. The utmost Madam Tutterville had been able to extract from her was the solemn promise not to leave Bath without further communicating with her; and this was on the understanding that Madam Tutterville would then take Barnaby into the rectory—since it was now safe to do so.

"And did she ever speak of David?" asked the reverend Horatio, his eye just blinking across to the latter's white face.

"Oh, she asked me how he was ... just at the end. I was actually on the doorstep when she caught me by the arm: 'How is David, aunt?'" quoth she.

Madam Tuttervile's tone expressed the mystification which something singular in her niece's manner seemed to have evoked.

“I told her he was away in London. Believing, of course, that you were still there, David. And I told her how well you are. What wonderful accounts we had to give of you. Quite, quite your old self, before—Ah!”

She broke off a little disconcerted at the allusions to which her tongue was drifting.

“And Ellinor said?” inquired the parson gently, this time keeping his gaze away from his friend’s face.

“Ellinor!” The lady’s visage became wrinkled into fresh lines of perplexity. “Poor dear child! I fear she is very weak and nervous still. ‘I am so glad, so glad!’ she said, that was all.... But, do you know, I verily believe that, as she closed the door on me, I heard her sob. I had it in my heart to go back but, dear Horatio, she had pushed the bolt!”

Madam Tutterville turned from her contemplation of the doctor’s determinedly impassive features to stare at David. And whatever she then saw, it seemed all at once to procure her the liveliest, yet the most agreeable, surprise. On the verge of an outcry, she checked herself, nodded, pursed her lips, rolled an eye of weighty meaning at her lord, and rising, remarked with an air of abnormal detachment, that it was getting late and she had had a vast of fatigue.

The parson, with a gesture of acquiescence, turned to David.

“Good evening, then,” said he.

And with a little burst of feeling which sat very well on his dignity, he turned back to look admiringly at his wife.

“How beautiful over the hills,” he exclaimed, “are the feet of the messenger of glad tidings!”

Madam Tutterville glanced down at her sandals and smiled with whole-hearted delight and pride. But the rector, instead of following up

his leave-taking, halted on his way to the door, lost in profound reflection. She respected the mood for an appreciable moment, then called on him, first tenderly, then with a shade of impatience.

“My dear love,” said he, when roused at last, “I pray you, wait for me in the parlour. There are now, I remember, a few words I must say to David. I will not keep you above a minute, my beloved Sophia.”

As the door closed the parson stood a little while in silence beside David’s motionless figure, regarding him gravely. Then said he:

“David! What is Bindon without Ellinor?”

David slowly turned his eyes.

“Why do you say that to me? Do I not know? Have I not felt it? Did you not yourself see what the moment of crossing my desolate threshold was to me! Did you not come with me into this empty room and hear its emptiness howl for her like the emptiness of my heart? Oh, for the sound of the rustle of her dress—of the least of her footfalls on the stairs!” He broke off, and suddenly lost his concentrated composure in a cry: “I’d give my soul to have her back!”

At this the parson was not shocked. Indeed he smiled more genially than if his companion had expressed the most pious resignation.

“Fortunately,” said he, “the price need not be so great!”

For a moment, in the glimmering dusk, David stared. Then catching his meaning, gave an inarticulate exclamation and sprang towards the door, where laughing now, the elder man laid hands on him.

“What! Is it boot and saddle, and spur and away? A Lochinvar! A very Lochinvar! Nay, nay, we are boys no longer, David. That is the right spirit, man, but we must act more circumspectly. Remember, it is a wounded bird, mysteriously wounded, and must be approached gently

and touched tenderly. Nay, never look like that! Lord, what weak children this love doth make of men! See, David, leave me but one day to work for you. Trust the older head. Age has its privileges: the old man can step in where the lover must stand aloof. As for you, get you to your stars: the clouds are driving off, 'tis like to be a clear night. Get you to your stars and dream!"

And as the Star-Dreamer made a gesture of indignant denegation the other broke again into a chuckling laugh.

"To your tower!" he insisted. "I never bade you dream only of heavenly things—go dream, in your endless spaces, of the sweetest thing on earth!"

"Horatio," began Madam Tutterville with great solemnity. They had reached the shade of the avenue and the lady, while leaning affectionately on the rector's arm, had maintained up to this an unwonted silence—"Horatio," said she, "you will no doubt scarcely credit it, but, without vanity, I may say that this has been a day of special revelation between myself and the Lord. I have observed. I have noted. There are certain signs. A woman's eye, my dear sir, is quick in these matters. In fact, Horatio, I really believe David is in love with Ellinor."

"My dear Sophia, you do not say so!"

"Indeed, doctor, but I do. Ah, you smile, you shake your head! Well, well, it would be strange, I grant, and something contradictious of fate that this should come to pass at last, which we have both so much desired, when one may say it would only seem now but an added complication. But (pray let me finish, Horatio), who are we that we should doubt the power of Providence? 'He can make the wilderness blossom like the rose.'"

"A beautiful text, Sophia, and quoted with commendable accuracy! Nevertheless," returned the parson, "I would most earnestly advise you

not to confide these very extraordinary suppositions of yours to any other human being. I have so high an opinion of your acumen, Madam Tutterville, and you have so brilliantly acquitted yourself to-day, that it would be a thousand pities to spoil so bright a record by these wild—these altogether feminine imaginings."

The poor lady acquiesced with a chastened air. When her Horatio adopted this decisive tone her submission was unqualified.

She did not speak again till they had reached the mellow mossy wall of the rectory orchard. Then she hazarded, in a small voice, that she dared say Dr. Tutterville would only laugh at her again, but she could not rest easy in her conscience without telling him that the more she had thought of the matter lately, and especially since her recent interview with Ellinor, the more the conviction had grown in her mind that the poor, pretty dear had been the victim of some base conspiracy. "That Margery!... not to speak of Lady Lochore——"

The rector halted, seized his wife by both hands, and exclaimed in a tone of genial admiration that brought back with a leap all her self-esteem:

"Sophia, there speaks your wise head! And," he added, pressing the hands he held: "there speaks my Sophia's kind heart."

And arm-in-arm once more, and both smiling, they crossed the peaceful threshold of their home.

# BOOK IV — CHAPTER III NOT WORDS, BUT HANDS MEETING

## CHAPTER III NOT WORDS, BUT HANDS MEETING

... Indeed I love thee: come Yield thyself up: my hopes and thine are one: Accomplish thou my manhood and thyself; Lay thy sweet hands in mine and trust to me. —TENNYSON (*The Princess*).

The rector passed half the night in that solitude which was ever respected by his wife as devoted to elegant study. But his energies were occupied by subjects neither classic nor biblic, nor yet philosophic. It was the diplomatic composition of one short letter that kept him employed into the deep hours.

The purpose of this missive was so close to his heart, the matter was so delicate; so necessary was it to display some guile, that the erudite gentleman had seldom set his wits a more difficult task.

The finished draft was of a masterpiece of its kind, though one could hardly say that the impression it conveyed to the reader adhered closely to actual fact. But, as it certainly conveyed the impression desired by the reverend Horatio, he read it over with great complacency before folding and sealing it. And when he retired at last to his couch, his conscience was more placid than altogether became a divine of the Anglican church, who had just been guilty of dealing in Jesuitical casuistry.

About six o’clock the next evening, as the rector sipped his after-dinner cup of bohea, he made casually the following announcement to his spouse:

“My love, I despatched a messenger to Bath by the coach this morning.”

Madam Tutterville put down her spoon and looked up eagerly.

“Indeed, doctor?”

“Yes, Sophia. I discovered that there was positively not another pinch of macabaw in my *tabatière*.”

The lady examined him sharply. Then before his impassive countenance her own fell considerably.

“It is a pity,” she remarked with some dryness, “that you did not make that discovery before I started yesterday.”

“It is, perhaps,” said the rector.

There was a slight pause; then the gentleman rose. “A lovely evening,” said he. “I think, Sophia, I will stroll down the park and meet the coach on its return.”

“My dear doctor, after dinner rest awhile.”

“I am pining, Sophia, for that *rapee*—or did I say macabaw? There’s not a pinch, not a pinch.”

As he passed out into the little garden, he said to himself:

“I am growing positively Machiavelian!” And thereat the abandoned rector breathed in the soft air, luxuriously.

It was a lovely evening, as he had said. September had been drifting on, in peace and suavity; and, this day, summer seemed to pause and watch the coming of inevitable autumn as a beautiful woman pauses and looks down the hill of life with a sweet resignation that lends her a new pathetic charm, unknown to the pride of her June or even to the exquisite promise of her April. The light was golden-yellow over the grass, where the shadows of the elms lay long. Now and then an early-withered leaf crackled under the parson’s foot. The rooks were cawing for their last

muster of the day; the kine were lowing towards far-off byres. There was a tramp of feet along the road without the walls and the distant sound of voices. The whole air was full of the music of evening home-comings. A sense of peace descended on the good man's soul, he bared his grey-crowned head and looked up at the placid sky, and felt a kind of faith in happiness.

It was to him as if the striving, the heat and the burden of the day had passed from their lives, and God's best gift, rest, was about to be bestowed at last.

Even as he was drawing near the gates, Ellinor was alighting from the coach, pale, tired, anxious-eyed, followed by a dusty Barnaby, who carried under his arm a cross Belphegor. They hurried through the wicket into the green arms of the park. Obedient to his mistress's gesture, the dumb boy with his burden struck immediately across the grass towards the rectory, while she paused to draw a deep breath and taste for a spell the sad delight of being once more in that beloved enclosure, which had been, and was still, all the world to her.

Presently she was startled to find the reverend Horatio at her side.

"Thrice welcome!" cried he, and there was unwonted emotion in his rich kind voice. She was folded in a paternal embrace. But, with both hands upon his shoulders, she drew back, to scan his countenance; and her eyes shot mingled joy and reproach upon him for that he looked so hale and placid. The while his gaze pitied the narrower oval of her flower face, the paled cheek that had been so warm-tinted, the shadowed eyes that had been so bright.

"My dear, my dear," he said, "you look very ill!"

"And you, Uncle Horatio, singularly well!" She drew still further from him as she spoke. And suddenly a rush of indignant blood dyed her pallor. "Why have you brought me here?" she cried. "If—oh, sir, this is

not right or kind!" With agitated gesture she sought a letter in her reticule. "Indeed, sir, you must have deceived me!"

But the rector smiled on unperturbed. There was no guilt, but rather an expression of self-approval, writ upon his every line. Ellinor unfolded a letter:

"My child, will you come and help nurse back to health a sick and weary man? I would not summon you, but that I know your kind heart, and that you give us love for love. I think the sight of you will go far towards making a cure. I shall expect you to-morrow.—Your old UNCLE HORATIO."

"P. S.—You will think that the sickness is sudden—not so sudden, perhaps! I will not say that it may not be dangerous, if your help is withheld."

In resentful tones Mrs. Marvel read out this artful billet. The rector showed no sign of confusion.

"Oh, uncle!" said she, when she had finished.

"Well, child," he returned, and tucked her rebellious arm under his own, "well, here has Bindon got you again, and here shall Bindon hold you!"

She went a little way by his side in silence. Bindon grass was tender to her feet and Bindon airs balmy to her face. Bindon woods, gathering close about her, seemed to fold her round with a sense of security and faithful guardianship—David's Bindon, full of him, though empty just now, as she thought, of his dear presence. God, was it not all too sweet? Was not her mad heart too insensately throbbing with that poisoned sweetness of it—and to what end? She wrenched her hand from the close pressure of his elbow:

"Why have you played me this cruel trick? Why have you lured me here on a pretence?" she asked again, resentfully.

Before the passion of her distress, parson Tutterville dropped the amiable banter of speech and manner and became grave.

“My dear child,” he answered, taking both her hands in his— “there was no pretence. There is a sick man here who needs you very much, sorely indeed!”

His meaning flashed into her soul almost before the words had left his lips. She formed the word: “David!” And he felt her tremble violently.

“I understood David was away,” she said. “He is ill?”

He was shocked at himself for the anxiety he had unwittingly caused; and, moved to the very core by this depth of feeling he had hitherto barely guessed at:

“Forgive me, child,” he said gently. “David returned yesterday. He is not sick in body—no,” hastily reading yet whiter terror on her face, “nor yet in mind, thank God! But he is sick at heart.”

“Sick at heart!”

“Aye, for want of you!”

Once more Ellinor crimsoned, but this time it was the “lovely banner of love” that flaunted on her poor white face.

“Did David send for me?”

The cry smote the good man now with its sound of irrepressible joy. Short as their interview had been, he felt ever more strongly how clumsy were even his well-meaning fingers upon this delicate thing—a woman’s heart. “One man only,” he said to himself, “has the right to play on that lute—that is the man she loves.” And aloud:

“No, David does not know,” he replied.

“Then why am I here-what will he think?”

She looked wildly round, almost as if she would have started running back all those miles to her hiding-place. The rector laid a restraining hand upon her shoulder. She turned on him fiercely.

“You should not have brought me here!”

“My child, you should never have left us!”

When there was that tone in Horatio Tutterville’s voice and that look in his kind eye, his rarely exercised authority made itself irresistibly felt. Ellinor’s reproachful anger was turned to a filial pleading:

“Dear uncle, how could I remain, how can I remain?... after ... after——” Her lips trembled: they could not frame the words of the odious charge which still lay against her fair fame.

“And have we been so wanting towards you, Ellinor, all this time, that you feel there is not one of us to whom you could give your confidence?”

She gave a little cry as if the reproach had stabbed her.

“Ah, no! Tis not like that! Oh, Uncle Horatio, it is because I cannot speak. If you knew, you would be the first to see that I cannot speak.”

Then all the shrewd surmises that had been floating in Dr. Tutterville’s brains ever since David’s own confession assumed the complexion of certainty. No need for him to pry further. He knew. At least he knew quite enough. His first triumph at his own sagacity was succeeded by a gush of admiration for the steadfast self-abnegation of the woman.

“Keep your secret, child,” he said tenderly. “We are all, mark me, all, quite ready to trust you.”

But Ellinor no longer heard him. She was looking past him, towards the house. Her eyes had become fixed—then dilated. She shivered again slightly, and then she stood quite still. David, with long, quick strides, was coming across the chequered shade and light of the avenue.

Horatio Tutterville caught his breath slightly and stepped back against the bole of a vast-girthed elm so as to sink his noticeable personality almost out of sight. The crisis had come sooner than he expected. He had planned it to be under Bindon's roof—well, it was fated to be under the arches of Bindon's trees! Now were the matters passing out of his muddling hands. Now was the crucial moment of the two lives on which he hung all his own hopes, the lives of those who were to him son and daughter, to whom he looked to be the crown of his old age. Good man, his ambition was selfless enough: all he asked of these two was to be happy! From behind the springing twigs he watched, with a beating heart.

When her lover was within a few paces of her, Ellinor, moved by some uncontrollable impulse, went forward to meet him. She took a hasty step or two and then stood, hands outstretched. And David saw her, with a shaft of yellow light striking her white forehead and flaming in her enaureoled hair, poised in lovely waiting for his welcome—even as, now nearly a year ago, he had first seen her and deemed that his beauteous star-vision had taken human shape.

There were no words—their hands met. There was no surprise in his eyes: only a great joy.

"Something drove me hither," he said presently, "and it was you! The whole day I could not rest, and you were coming home, coming back to me! Oh, Ellinor, never leave us again! We are dead without you, Bindon and I!"

She looked up at him with brimming eyes, eyes as blue as his star.

"Never again," she returned, "if you and Bindon want me!"

Then David bent and laid his lips upon hers. And hand-in-hand, gravely they walked together through the trees.

The parson looked after them, a broad smile upon his lips. Then he wiped his forehead and then he wiped his eyes. Then he came out from his discreet place and blew deep a puffing breath of relief. How he had plotted and planned; how cautiously and tortuously he had worked for this; how many convincing speeches he had rehearsed; how many intricate scenes, tearful or passionate, through which his tact alone was to pilot the sensitive lovers.... And behold! It was so simple! Oh, simple. Not a word of explanation, no start, no cry, no inquiry, no tears!—They met and clasped hands and kissed. And yet how natural it all was! The inevitable coming together of two who could not live without each other.

“I will allow them a couple of hours of paradise,” said the rector importantly to himself, as, quite forgotten, he turned in the opposite direction, “before calling them to earth again. I will even bring the news to Sophia and bid her prepare the guest-chamber.”

“A special licence,” thought the reverend gentleman, professionally, as he reached his garden gate. “Only a special licence, I believe, will meet the requirements of the case.” His hand on the latch he began to laugh softly: “I have certainly been on the verge of wiliness. It is fortunate that Sophia will have a vast deal to occupy her mind before the nuptials, for I am not going to spoil these wondrous results by one word. Poor Sophia, I fear there are certain explanations which are destined to be for ever withheld from thee!”

He could afford to feel superior over the thought of her unsatisfied curiosity, his superior acumen having put him out of reach of any such mortifying situation. The reverend Horatio knew Ellinor’s secret, and was content that she should keep it. He would not even allow himself to speculate upon whether she would reveal it to David; and if so, in what manner. That was part of the sacredness of their future life. It belonged to the sanctuary which every lover keeps for the beloved, and into which,

not even with uncovered feet or bowed head, might the most reverent stranger dare to enter.

# BOOK IV — CHAPTER IV A DREAM OF WOODS AND OF LOVE

## CHAPTER IV A DREAM OF WOODS AND OF LOVE

Has our whole earth gone nearer to the glow Of your soft splendours, that you look so bright? *I* have climbed nearer out of lonely Hell. Beat, happy stars, timing with things below, Beat with my heart more blest than heart can tell. —TENNYSON (*Maud*).

Five days went like a dream over Ellinor's head. And when she woke up upon the sixth and saw the daylight grow upon the panelled wall of her room at the rectory, and knew it was the day that would see her David's wife, she still felt as if she were in a dream. But it was a dream of great peace. All conflict, all violent emotion, all sense even of having to decide for herself, had gone from her. She was being guided and willingly went, without a single anxious thought for the future.

As in a dream she allowed Madam Tutterville, who fluttered between smiles and tears, to robe her in her wedding garment. "Wear your grey gown," David had once said to her. And so she was clothed this day in the colour he had liked.

Dream-like still was the simple ceremony in Bindon's mossy little church, where a very solemn and reverent rector gave their union the blessing of God from the depth of his fatherly heart.

Coming down the aisle she noted with a vague smile what a monstrous white tie, what a cauliflower of a button-hole, adorned the figure of old Giles; how sheepishly some village notabilities were peeping at the new lady of Bindon as she paused to lay her wedding flowers on the stone that

had but so lately been shifted for the laying to rest of Bindon's sorcerer; how deeply these same good people curtsied—deepest those who had been most anxious to bring faggots for a witch's pyre; how loud a cheer gave Joe Barnwall, whose pitchfork thrust had nearly ended all weal and woe for her but a month ago; with what strenuous childish importance the chubby hand that had flung stones at her, now helped to strew flowers before her bridal foot!

Then a golden day at the rectory—long and yet strangely short. There was a wonderful wedding feast of four—which the rector vastly commended. They had the first pears from the rector's pear-tree. And the rector and his lady quoted, after their special fashion, to their heart's content. The rector gave a toast and made a little speech, with as much gusto, as felicitous a turn of phrase and as elegant a delivery as if he had been presiding at the most select gathering Oxford dignity could produce.

At sunset, however, the moment fixed by herself for walking forth with her husband to her home, Ellinor suddenly awoke—awoke to the fact that she was married to her beloved, that she was his and he was hers, for ever; that they were starting on their new life together—and yet that there still was something between them!

Her secret was still untold; that secret once so heavy, now so glad; that secret which once she had guarded with so anxious watch upon herself, which now the minutes were all too slow till she could set it free!

He had not asked for it: he never would. Better than all, he was content to believe in her. He, whom a diseased mistrust of his fellow-creatures had driven from the world for the best part of his life, could show to her, now in circumstances so extraordinary, this beautiful blind confidence. Oh, how she loved him for it! How rich, since he loved her thus, should be his reward! How happy was she in this planning of the supreme moment of his joy! So, with the touch of the rector's fatherly hand upon her brow, and aunt Sophia's last tear-bedewed kiss upon her cheek; with her

familiar old grey cloak wrapped round her wedding finery, and the little bunch from the Herb-Garden (Barnaby's quaint offering) sweet upon her breast, she passed forth from the little autumnal orchard into the vast green spaces of the park. Close against David she pressed, leaning upon him, walking in thought-laden silence. In silence too he went, respecting her mood; but each time he turned his face upon her under the yellow light, she marked its radiance; and in the quivering trouble of her joy all the web of her pretty schemes seemed shaken apart, so that she was fain to begin to weave afresh.

It was a lemon and orange sunset reflected round the sky—the sunset that presages storm—and the wind was already high and tore with swelling organ-chant through the trees of the avenue; a great mild west wind, booming up from the woods, hurling past them with a beat as of wide soft wings and rushing on with its song of triumph.

"Let us go by the wood," said Ellinor. He turned to her quickly, the glory of the sinking day in his eyes.

"To you too, then," he said, "this is a good hour! Listen to our wedding choral that the wind now sings in the arches of these trees."

They turned across the turf towards where elm and ash, oak and scented pine made a night of their own already, though at the top of many a swaying bough the thrush and the blackbird still piped to the gleaming west; though the rooks were still circling and the first star shone no brighter than a small white daisy in a strip of eastward sky, faintly green like a fairy field. In the woody depths they drew yet closer together. Here, though the wind-voices were never hushed at all, but kept up their chant continuously overhead, the lower spaces seemed so still, that the lovers almost thought to go in silence beneath a canopy of sound. They heard the faintest leaf whisper as they passed it, and the tiniest twig snap beneath their tread. Suddenly David halted.

“Strange,” said he, passing his hand across his brow. “How often there has come upon me of late a memory as of a dream—a dream of woods and of you. A dream of woods and of love! And yet you were not with me. Nay, now it comes back; you were not with me, but I was going to you; and the trees were all speaking of you and bidding me haste to you. A mad dream, but sweet!”

He would have clasped her to him but she, who had listened with her heart beating so happy-fast that it would scarce let her draw breath, held him away with soft hands:

“Oh, David,” she panted, “think back on that dream again!”

“It is gone,” he answered, smiling, “the reality is so much sweeter!”

She stood still holding him from her and yet to her, with a delicate touch. His words had suddenly cleared before her a golden path: the heart that loves has its own flashes of genius.—Yes, it should be so, she resolved.

She drew a long breath. Without another word she passed her arm within his again and led him on. He allowed himself to be guided whither she would in glad obedience; all she did this hour was well done for him.

It was full night when they left the dim aisles of trees and the high sighing choirs, and emerged into the windswept fields. Ellinor looked up at the sky:

“It will be a night of stars,” she said. “Thank God!”

“Ah, love,” he answered her, “my heaven is on earth to-night!”

She nodded her head, with a flickering enigmatic smile; and in another spell of silence she brought him, through the shrubbery tangle, to that spot where, across the ivied ruined walls and the spaces of the Herb-Garden, the light from her gable-window had been wont to shine out through the summer nights.

“David,” she whispered—he could feel how she trembled beside him as she spoke, could almost hear the flutter of her heart through her voice—“will you do all I bid you to-night?”

“Surely,” he made answer with infinite gentleness.

“Then, David, will you wait till from here you can see my light, the light in the window of my old room! And then, David, when the light shines, will you come to me there?”

Close though they stood together in the gloom, neither could see the other’s face but as a dim whiteness. Yet, at these words, Ellinor felt how the serenity that her husband’s countenance had worn all the evening was broken up and swept away by a storm of passion—a passion as wide in its strength and yet as tender as the wild west gale that now in its rush embraced them and passed on, hymning.

He bowed his head, because he could not trust himself in words, and because the other answer he would have given her, the answer of straining arms and eager silent lips, she once again eluded.

The next instant he was alone with the choir of the elements, the great gathering company of the stars, and his own tumultuous thoughts.

Ellinor was back in the little room that had held her as child and widow; that now received her, a bride trembling on the verge of joy.

No one had expected the lady of Bindon to go back to this humble nest. There was a great belighted and beflowered apartment awaiting her in state, somewhere in the house; whereas here, shutters were barred and all was in darkness, spiced of lavender and dried roses. She laid down the lamp she had culled from a wall on her secret way, and set about her preparations with the haste that will not stay to think.

Off with the grey satin robes that she had trailed across the dew-sprent grass and the brown wood paths; down with the curls and twists and the

high-jewelled combs wherewith Madam Tutterville had so lovingly adorned her bridal head.... All her glorious hair in one loose unbound coil; thus——! Now, from the recesses of yonder press the white loose long-folded wrapper which, in her mourning flight, she had deemed unsuitable for the small trunk of the working woman. And now, over all, the great grey cloak once more!

This done, she lifted the lamp again and held it while she stood a second before the mirror. Yes! so must she have looked, upon that night of false joy—that night of delusions and terrors. But truly, not with that fire of expectancy in her eye, those chasing blushes and pallors on her cheeks, that flock of rosy smiles that no effort of will could keep away for long!

Now was the moment come to unbar the shutters and set the casement wide, to let in the breath of the late honeysuckle, the exotic fragrances of poor Master Simon's ravaged garden—to let out, across the wide spaces, the summoning beams of her lamp!

She held it aloft a moment, then lit a rushlight: for in not one detail must she omit anything of that Lammas-night's dream-scene to be re-enacted, this time with awakened senses, to the assuring of their great comfort. And then, between the inner and the outer rooms she stood, bare-footed, waiting, listening—the one anguished moment of that happy day!

And yet not long had she to wait. With incredible speed came the sounds for which her heart yearned so fiercely; light, unfaltering steps, approaching along the echoing stone passage; the door of the outer room opening, it seemed, at the same instant ... and David stood before her, out of the darkness! David, with shining eyes, the heavy hair tossed back from his forehead, with the pungent breath of the night woods hanging about his garments.

“Come in, David,” said she and strove to make her tones as placid in her tremulous expectancy as, on that other night, they had been in her desperate courage.

She stepped back into the inner room as she spoke, and he followed. Ah, here the parallel ceased! Followed her, not with the dilated gaze of the sleep-walker, unknowing, unconscious; but as the strong man crosses the threshold of his beloved’s chamber, in passionate reverent realisation.

From her taper she lit all the candles, and then turned to him with a smile that quivered upon thrust-down tears.

“Sit down, dear cousin, and we can talk a little; but not for long”—here the smile, emboldened, became tender, faintly mischievous— “but not long, for we both must sleep!”

A second he had watched her unexpected ways with amazement: but at her words, arrested on his impulse towards her, he stood and again clasped his forehead. His eye ran over her figure from loosened hair to bare feet.

“The dream again!” he said in a whisper. A sort of bewilderment, a trouble gathered upon his splendour of happiness.

Ellinor broke in quickly: she must not keep her beloved in perplexity. Every word of what she wanted to say was imprinted on her memory; no need here to hesitate. She leaned towards him, a lovely Sibyl, finger on lip, and poured her mysterious message into his soul.

“Remember,” said she, “remember, David, the blessed cup I gave you and how it set you free. It ran like fire through your veins, it drove you out into the wood, under the singing trees. Those trees took voices: ‘Go to her,’ they sang, and waved their arms. They ran with you, and you came, leaping over the mountains. Love, you have come, and you are free, free to love me!”

“Ellinor!” he cried, and caught her hands in his. Ever nearer she bent to him, ever more tenderly. Oh, surely never man heard words so sweet, so sweetly spoken on his bridal night!

“You knew I was waiting for you, in my white garments, with my light burning. You knew that, because of my faithful heart.”

When she said this, even as before on that Lammas-tide, he kissed both her hands. But he had no word for her. Yet she saw how the radiance of her dawn strove with the clouds of his doubt and darkness.

“Always, since first we met,” she went on, “have our hearts been singing to each other. I have stood beside you on your tower ... perhaps you did not know it always,” the tears brimmed to her lashes, but the dimple by her smile was arch as she paraphrased his unforgettable words to suit her woman’s lips: “In the dawn you sought me in the garden....”

She was halting now, stammering a little. He had dropped her hand.

“What trial is this!” he cried. “What test do you put me to? Your words bring me back to the past and sweet, though they are, there is trouble mingled with them. Ellinor, why drive me back to dreams when I am at last awake! Ellinor, Ellinor, the past is gone but the present I will hold!”

He caught her in his arms, strong arms of love. This in sooth was no dream-wooer!

“But, David,” she said, “it is because of the present that I want you to go back to the past. Oh, David, for love of me, go back to that night when you took the cup from my hand and you had a long, long sleep! Did you not dream?”

The tide of crimson that rushed into her face at these words was reflected in flame upon his. He would soon know now. The gossamer veil which still divided him from the truth was being rift. Yet a last diffidence kept down the cry of understanding on his lips. And still they were seeking

hers in passionate silence. But that kiss which he would fain have had; that kiss which might have been the kiss of revelation, Ellinor held in reserve to be the seal of their acknowledged joy. She turned her head to glance out of the window.

The great moment of her life had struck at last. The very harmony of the heavens seemed to be working for its record. The stars, in their passionless courses, had had strange influence over the life of that poor child of earth; and now it was as if they that had mocked her were making gracious atonement. Serene and aloof, the stately measure that had held at midnight the new-gemmed Northern Crown over the lovers' mad meeting on that past Lammas-tide, was now unfolding at the ninth hour the self-same aspect of glory over their bridal joy. Against the line of David's tower, just emerging out of blackness, the light of the new star, even as she looked, glided forth upon them.

"See, love," she called, and gently turned his face towards the casement: "See, our Star—"

And, as he looked, he saw. Deep into his soul dropped the tender beam; and with it a revelation that seemed to fire where it struck. He gave a loud cry: "The dream, the dream!" then fell at her feet. "So strong, so chaste, so silent!... Oh, my wife!"

The tears streamed down her face as she stooped to raise him to her lips.

"The dream-life is over, David. We stand upon the threshold of the golden chamber. Shall we not enter?"

---