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THE ACADEMICIAN.

BY

HENRY ERROLL,

AUTHOR OF "AN UGLY DUCKLING."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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RICHARD BENTLEY AND SON,

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Constance and Mrs. Simes liked each other less every day. Mrs. Simes had been deceived and disappointed in Connie; she had not much discrimination of character, and had looked upon the girl, in consequence of her extreme amiability when she was sitting to Mr. Baring, as a good, nice little woman, with whom it would be easy to do anything. Like a châtelaine
of old, who was proud to instruct a daughter-in-law, whose education had been neglected, in the mysteries of pickling, preserving, and pastry-making, Mrs. Simes had intended to initiate Connie into the no less intricate, though far more profitable, secrets of bone-boiling, servant-starving, and bill-reducing.

Economy was in Mrs. Simes's opinion a science—and a science well worth study. There was a triumphant glow at her heart when the leg of mutton had lasted four days instead of three, compared to which the transitory comfort of a well-filled stomach was but low in the scale. To get Stephen to innocently drink some beer which, during its progress from cellar to dining-room, had paid a short visit to the water-tap, was a real pleasure, although one she did not dare to indulge in very
often. The respective filling merits of cold or hot potatoes, lentil soup, and oatmeal porridge occupied much of her thoughts, and had even kept her awake at night. Mrs. Simes took her housekeeping very seriously; to her it was a sacred vocation, and she had always intended that her mantle should fall upon Stephen’s wife.

No mantle of the sort, however, would have stayed on Connie’s narrow little shoulders. Poor pleasure-loving, dainty, luxurious Connie, who hardly knew what animal milk came from, and would not have been surprised to hear that butter was a vegetable!

At Layton Abbey, the kitchen, the larder, the pantry, had been regions unexplored by her. She had never belonged, even for one half-hour, to the race of children from whom nothing can be hidden, and to whom
a prohibition is simply a whet to curiosity. Connie had never, like Hubert, rushed into the kitchen with salad from her own garden, which the cook was to be sure to use; she had never violated the sanctity of the spice-box, in a search after cinnamon; she had never begged hard to be allowed to mix some dough, or cut her fingers in the ardour of slicing orange-peel for marmalade; she had never helped the butler to polish the silver, or filled the salt-cellars. Hubert had done all this, and a good deal more besides. The utmost Connie knew of the servants' quarters was the housekeeper's room—a dreary, horse-hair furnished apartment, where she dimly remembered being very much interested in what she could catch of a conversation between Robson, her aunt's maid, and the housekeeper, in which Miss Durant's name
recurred frequently, always followed by mysterious shakings of the head and clickings of the tongue from the two who were not speaking. A recollection of over-strong tea, and buttered toast with too much butter on it, accompanied this picture in Connie’s mind, and when she had grown up, she had never once paid the old housekeeper a visit in her own room, although she had often seen her in Robson’s.

At Mrs. Chesham’s, things although of course on a very different scale, had been quite as decorously and invisibly attended to. Mabel was intimately well acquainted with every nook and cranny of the kitchen; she knew the tricks of the oven, and was an excellent cook herself, but she had never asked Connie to come down with her.

And so, until poor Connie was married, she had never seen anything of house-
keeping. Left to herself, she would have ordered just what she thought Stephen would like, without any reference to what was in the house, or to the butcher's account. She would have given the servants *carte blanche*, for which they would have liked her a great deal better than they did the virtuous Mrs. Simes, who seemed to think "a poor girl wouldn't mind bein' just such another bag o' bones as herself."

Mrs. Simes had never intended to let slip the reins of government—she loved them far too dearly for that—but she had wished to teach Connie how to keep house after her own ideal. And Connie proved a most refractory pupil. She objected to eat the same meat day after day, although Mrs. Simes clearly and plainly demonstrated to her that it was far more eco-
nomical to buy a good large joint, which would "do" over several days, and the bone of which would then boil down for soup. She turned up her nose at cheap fish, and declined to touch stale bread. It must be confessed that neither Mrs. Simes nor Mr. Baring was fastidious in their taste.

It was simply wonderful to see the artist eat whatever was put before him, and all the more remarkable to Connie, because during their honeymoon abroad he had been rather particular about his food—far more so than she, who would just then have found a crust of dry bread tête-à-tête with Stephen delicious. The fact was, that Mr. Baring did sometimes get woefully tired of his aunt's menus. When he felt that he could really bear it no longer, he had been wont to dine out by himself
for a week at a time, affecting principally the cheap little Italian and French restaurants about Soho, where he got a change from Mrs. Simes's flavourless stews and hashes.

Baring was veritably a miser at heart, however, especially where others were concerned. It positively hurt him—pulled at his heart-strings—to change a sovereign. And yet his artist-nature continually drove him to spend money, and even a good deal of money. Mrs. Simes had at first held up her hands in horror at the extravagance of some of the things he had bought for his new house; but she had been made to understand that these were business properties, so to speak—the *mise en scène* which was absolutely necessary to a man of his calling and reputation—and had resigned herself,
resolving to be all the more watchful downstairs, to make up.

Baring liked all things that appealed to the pleasure of the eye. He might be said almost to live through his eyes. Form and colour were everything to him. He loved rich hangings, exquisite carvings, soft carpets, quaint furniture, and would give a hundred guineas for some article of virtu when he would hesitate to expend sixpence on having his hair cut.

He would sit in his beautiful studio, dressed in a shirt fringed at collar and cuffs and far from spotless, an old velveteen coat, and a pair of trousers so ancient and so terribly frayed that they looked quite ludicrous when he got up. The incongruity of the thing never occurred to him. He was sublimely indifferent to the opinions of others on
such points, and did precisely as he chose, without reference to any other human being.

This slovenliness of his distressed Connie greatly. She had never seen a man careless of his clothes. Hubert, although his resources were so limited nowadays, always managed somehow or other to appear in spotless linen, even if his coat were somewhat shabby. She could not understand how any one could bear, for their own sakes, to put on a soiled shirt and ragged garments. She herself was as dainty as a kitten. Dirt in any form was abhorrent to her.

Just as little as she could comprehend this side of Baring did he appreciate the difference in her. The picturesque, the harmonious, the gorgeous were what he liked in women. Let a woman's features
be beautiful, let her figure satisfy his critical eye, let her limbs be perfect in form and colour, what cared he whether she were coarse in her habits and common in her mode of living!

Connie's exquisite personal refinement did not appear in the slightest degree admirable to him. He laughed at the time she took over her daily ablutions, and was surprised to find that she sat to have her hair brushed for half an hour twice a day. Mrs. Simes called this "ridiculous affectation," and Baring felt very much inclined to agree with her. Of Connie's mental torture and ever-growing disgust at his own commonness and want of perception he had not the very remotest suspicion. His affection for his wife was by no means of the kind that "teacheth all things," and his complacent ignorance
about his shortcomings added to their enormity.

Poor Connie felt her delicate self outraged, offended, a hundred times a day. Her own lack of comprehension of others made her attribute this not to want of knowledge, which it really was, but to deliberate and intentional disregard of her feelings. She always judged from the surface; and it seemed impossible to her that a man who lived for beauty, who surrounded himself with rare and lovely things, should be so incapable of understanding what were to her matters of course. She suspected that he grudged her the expense of herself, and that his laughs and sneers were of set intention, and the prelude to depriving her of everything in the way of luxury.

She had loved Stephen very much in
her own shallow little way; had thought it romantic to marry a great artist, and had been inordinately proud of having captured him. She would have gone on loving him if he had been different; but there are some things before which a woman's love, even when it is greater than Connie's, goes down like a bird before a gun. It was not want of comprehension; it was not that their minds were as far apart as the North from the South Pole; it was not pique at his superior devotion to his art; it was for other reasons that Constance gradually ceased to love her husband. The face that was so noble when looking at his own work became coarse and satyr-like when they were alone together. The genius, the artist disappeared, and in their place was only a common, unrefined man, who did not know
what a gentlewoman was. How this could be so she failed to understand, and, as we have said, preferred to put it down to deliberate unkindness on her husband's part.

She attempted to confide to a certain extent in Mabel; but Mabel, whether wrongly or rightly, felt that it was impossible for her to act as confidante, and, as kindly as she could, begged Connie not to tell her things that concerned only her husband and herself.

The artist's household was thus by no means a happy one. Baring regretted the loss of his freedom, and wished with all his heart that he had not let himself be bound with Connie's gilded chain; Mrs. Simes was in a perpetual ferment of indignation; and Connie herself was lonely and miserable.
At last, when they had been married nearly a year, she begged her husband to allow her to invite Mabel to stay with her. Baring had managed to impress upon his wife that she was not to ask people to his house, even for a meal, without his consent.

"Certainly. I shall be very pleased for you to have Miss Moore."

"Only she's not to be shut up in the studio all day long, remember, Stephen. I want her for myself."

"You'll lend her to me sometimes, though," said Baring, with one of his enigmatical smiles.

Mabel was very pleased to come. She was glad to get away from George for a little. That gentleman made a few amiable remarks before she departed.

"Good-bye, my dear. I shall welcome
you back from Bohemia. I suppose you and your artist friend will be painting together all day long?"

"I haven't even taken my brushes," said Mabel, laughing. When one was going to leave "dear George," one could afford to laugh at his spiteful speeches.

Constance was in a wild state of excitement when her friend arrived. She and Robson had been stealing from every room in the house for the benefit of Mabel's.

"I'm afraid, dear," she said rather dolefully, as she sat on the bed, while Robson unpacked Mabel's things, "that you won't be very comfortable. Robson and I will do our best, but that doesn't amount to much—does it, Nurse?"

"My dear Con," said Mabel, cheerfully, "what's good enough for you is certainly good enough for me. Please remember
that I am not a spoilt and pampered young woman like yourself.”

“Spoilt! Pampered!” echoed Connie. “Why, would you believe, Mabel,” leaning forward and speaking very earnestly— “would you believe that Mrs. Simes actually thinks it wrong to wash in warm water!”

“Why?” asked Mabel.

“Oh, why I don’t know—except that I suppose she considers it wicked to do or to have anything comfortable.”

“And do you wash in cold?”

“Certainly not. If I wanted to, I wouldn’t, just for the sake of doing what she doesn’t like.”

Mabel did not feel strongly drawn towards Mrs. Simes herself, but she was very anxious to make matters better between Connie and the cross old house-
keeper; so she began by rather hypocritically praising some dish at dinner—a way which she was quite aware was a sure one to Mrs. Simes's heart.

Mrs. Simes was suspicious and sulky, however, and put on airs of virtuous indignation which made Mabel want to laugh, and Constance look vexed.

Mabel was in high spirits that evening. They went into the studio after dinner, where she presently infected Connie with her gaiety, and between them Mr. Baring passed a more agreeable evening than he had perhaps ever spent before.

There was not a word of pictures—not a syllable about art.

The two girls chattered incessantly, Mabel particularly. She played the piano, and insisted on trying the old mandolins, guitars, and harp which were in various
corners of the studio. She dressed Connie up, and the lay figure as well. Finally they ran up to bed, their merry voices reaching Baring in the studio until Mabel's bedroom door was shut.

"How different!" thought the artist. "She has not twenty thousand pounds; but there are twenty thousand other reasons for—liking her."
CHAPTER II.

A NEW VENTURE.

Mabel found her visit very pleasant on the whole. She soon lost any shyness she might have felt of Mr. Baring, who gave himself more trouble to amuse and entertain her than he had ever done for any living person before.

The artist's admiration for his charming visitor grew with every day. He had not fully realized how beautiful she was; and, indeed, Mabel's face was not one to be learned easily, any more than her character. Nobody had ever known or understood her
thoroughly yet. Her lover, Hubert, might perhaps in time, but at present his understanding of her was more intuition than real knowledge, which could only come with time and close companionship. To Mr. Baring she was simply irresistible. His longing to paint her became almost a pain to him. A hundred times he was on the point of begging her to sit; but he was a wise man, and knew how to bide his time. She should sit, but not yet. Meanwhile he lived in the fascination of her smile and the light of her loveliness. Constance almost turned to him again; he was so kind and thoughtful, and seemed to appreciate her society so much more, never snubbing her, or cutting her childish speeches short with a sneer or sarcastic word. It never occurred to her that it was because Mabel was there that Stephen
accompanied them in long walks, or that he got tickets for the play, and even took them out once to dinner.

Nor did Mabel herself suspect the fact. Mr. Baring had supreme control over himself; not once by word or look, so long as he chose not, did he express his feeling for her. She liked him very much, quite frankly and without arrière pensée of any sort. She certainly considered him a very unfit husband for Constance; but then, as she said to herself, what sort of man would have been a fit husband for Connie? An animated Twelfth-cake Prince would have done better than anything else she could think of.

They did not see much of Hubert. Baring had an inkling that his wife's brother was in love with Mabel, and although he had no means of fathoming
Mabel's own feelings on the subject, he thought it very likely that she cared for him, and the thought was not a pleasant one to him. So he had not asked Hubert, and Hubert was far too proud to trouble his successful brother-in-law very often with his company.

One evening, however, he came in after dinner, when the girls were sitting in the studio.

He looked a little less wan and dejected than the last time Mabel had seen him. Her quick observation soon discovered something different about him—a kind of suppressed nervous excitement which was quite foreign to him. His eyes had a curious glitter in them; he was alternately talkative and abstracted.

Baring, watching him very closely, noticed his first glance at Mabel, who
was looking particularly lovely, and his suspicion was confirmed, although nothing in Hubert's speech or manner could have betrayed him.

"Have a pipe, Durant?" he asked. Mr. Baring never smoked cigars himself, partly for the reason that if he had none, he could not offer his visitors any.

"No, thanks," returned Hubert, with a look at the girls.

"Oh, you needn't mind us," said Connie, laughing. "We're smoke-dried. Stephen is never without a horrid pipe in his mouth."

Thus urged, Hubert accepted a pipe.

"Have you been working hard lately?" Mabel asked as usual, looking at Hubert with frank affection.

"Yes, very," said Hubert.

"Picture for the Academy?" asked Baring.
“No,” said Hubert, slowly; “not for the Academy. They wouldn’t hang what I’ve been painting.”

“Too good for us?” Baring suggested sarcastically.

“Not in your way,” Hubert replied, shortly.

“Tell us all about it, Hubert,” said Connie, coaxingly.

“You’ll be able to see for yourselves soon enough; I’ve taken a gallery in Bond Street,” said Hubert.

“All for your own pictures?” exclaimed Constance.

Baring looked curiously at his brother-in-law.

“I echo Connie’s question,” he said.

“Well, you know,” said Hubert, painfully conscious of Mabel’s eyes, “that they call anything a gallery in Bond Street, even if it’s no larger than a dog-kennel. This is
a small room, which will just take the things I want to show."

"Tell us what the pictures are?" Mabel herself said.

Hubert laughed awkwardly.

"Oh no, I can't describe," he said. "I open on Monday, and then you can see for yourselves. Come to the private view."

"Dear me! fancy having a private view all to one's self!" observed Baring.

"I dare say it sounds absurd to you," said Hubert, loftily; "but if I were to wait until you Academicians chose to hang me, I might go on like this for years. I want to make some money."

He looked full at Mabel as he spoke. Her eyes met his very anxiously. She could not make out what was the matter with him.

"Your own idea?" asked Baring.
“N—no,” answered Hubert. “I arranged it with a friend. But you’ll see all there is to see, which isn’t much, on Monday. Let’s talk of something else now, if you don’t mind. May I see what you have been doing?”—to Baring.

Mabel wondered what Hubert was about. She felt sure he was not in his normal condition. Who was this friend? How had he come to take so serious a step without consulting any of them about it? She would have given a good deal for a little quiet conversation with him, but there was no chance of that. Baring asked her to play presently, and after that it was time for Constance, who was always sleepy early, and consequently for herself, to go to bed. She said good night to Hubert rather wistfully, and could not help asking—
"Are you well to-night?"

"Quite, thanks," Hubert answered, with a laugh; and that was all she could say.

When the two men were left alone, Baring, who felt very curious about this new idea of Hubert's, said, far more cordially than was usual with him—

"Now then, old fellow; we'll have up some whisky-and-water, and you shall tell me all about these pictures of yours."

"I'd much rather not talk about them," Hubert answered. "I'm not at all sure that you'll like them."

"But what are they?" Baring persisted.

"There are only one or two," said Hubert, "and a few of my friend's."

"Also a young artist like yourself?" inquired Baring.

"A few years older. A Frenchman."

"Do I know him?"
"Victor Barthélemy."

"No—never heard his name. And so you are going to exhibit with him? French sort of pictures?"

Hubert wished he had held his tongue. This cross-questioning was peculiarly repellent to him.

"I don't know exactly to what nationality they may belong," he answered rather testily. "They are—fantastic kind of things. Not much like that," he added, with a laugh, looking towards the easel, on which stood a "Rachel mourning for her Children."

"No, I suppose not," Baring said dryly. Finding that he could get nothing further out of Hubert, Mr. Baring dropped the subject, and spoke of something else.

They had some whisky-and-water—
Hubert a small quantity, his host what was for him a good deal. After that Mr. Baring had a little more; and then his tongue suddenly loosened, and he became more talkative than Hubert had ever yet seen him.

He wandered from one thing to another, and at length, after his third glass, began to recall his youthful indiscretions. He lolled back in his chair, holding his pipe unsteadily between his teeth, every now and then taking it out and watching the curling wreaths of rising smoke with a semi-foolish, fatuous smile, as he rambled on, half to himself and half to Hubert. The latter, who was feeling very tired, hardly followed Mr. Baring's reminiscences, in which Baring himself and some awfully pretty girls played a prominent part.
Hubert was dreamily thinking of Mabel, and of how lovely she had looked as she wished him good night. Would his venture turn out a success? Barthélemy swore it would, and Barthélemy said he knew. What a curious fellow he was—Barthélemy! Although he had done so badly for himself, he seemed able to manage anything for other people. How well he had arranged all the business part of the affair! Hubert hardly knew how, but it was arranged, and advertised too. Barthélemy had attended to all that. Hubert himself had been busy painting. How hard he had worked! The last months seemed to him like a sort of dream, in which he figured as the principal actor, painting, painting away from morning till night, and often great part of the night as well—with only occasional stoppages for
meals, or a little rest, and sometimes for more morphia.

For Hubert had been taking morphia lately. He had got it at first because he had begun to suffer from very bad headaches, which allowed him no sleep, and affected his eyes so that he could hardly see to work. The drug had given him marvellous relief, and, not only that, it had seemed to help him in other ways. Never had he found his intelligence so clear, his ideas so lucid. He seemed to be able to see into people and things with wonderfully quickened observation; his hand moved over the canvas apparently of its own volition, and he, generally so difficult to satisfy, had lately often wondered at his own skill. He knew that he was doing an unwise thing, but he had no intention of giving himself up body and
soul to the seductive temptation; he believed sufficiently in his strength of will, which would be powerful enough to shake off the habit when its master chose to exert it. As it was, he did not exceed; he was always perfectly reasonable in his doses, except, perhaps, once or twice lately, He knew that he would have to pay the price of his imprudence presently, when his work was done, his narcotic stopped, and the reaction set in. But if Mabel were the prize, what would it signify, even if his health were temporarily impaired? He passed lightly over such trifles as the possibility of non-success, failure of will, permanent loss of nerve power. By next week he would have finished, and then he would take himself in hand again. It would be so easy!

At this point in his reflections he became
aware that Baring's voice had ceased, and that the painter was looking at him with a slightly defiant air.

Hubert rose with a start.

"How late it is! I must be going."

Baring got up too.

"By Jove! so it is. I have been talking a good deal of nonsense, I'm afraid?" he said tentatively.

"Oh no," Hubert answered. For the life of him he could not have told what Baring had been saying.

"Well, you know, you mustn't believe that in vino veritas—that's as humbugging as most common sayings are; and, anyway, this was whisky, wasn't it? Good night, old fellow. We shall turn up at your show on Monday."

The artist dismissed his brother-in-law with a weak smile, and Hubert went away.
When he got back to his lodgings he lighted his lamp, which had a strong reflector to it, and set it down so as to illuminate the picture he had finished that afternoon.

It was the bust and head of a girl—a girl with tawny-coloured hair in a tangled mass all round her head, a low, flat brow, a straight, thin nose, and a full-lipped, scarlet mouth, the parted lips showing a double row of straight, white, rather pointed teeth, set a little apart. The eyes were hardly more than narrow slits, through which gleamed irises of a golden brown, with pupils contracted like those of a cat in the daytime. She was dressed in some Eastern-looking stuff, which left her arms, throat, and bosom almost bare. The one side of her was very fair, the flesh rose-pink, with the blue veins
showing through the delicate skin. The other side, from the right eyebrow to the half-visible right breast, was one mass of terrible and only partially healed scars, which showed up red and purple against the tender tint of the rest of the skin. The right corner of the upper lip had been dragged up a little, and the lower lid of the right eye somewhat depressed in the healing of the burns, or whatever had caused this dreadful disfigurement, giving a suspicion of malicious cruelty to the whole face. The girl had one hand raised—a little velvet-looking white hand, dimpled at wrist and knuckles, and with almond-shaped, pink nails. Between her forefinger and thumb she held, delicately pinched together, a butterfly, which had evidently taken its last flight. She was looking at the insect with her feline eyes.
Hubert examined the picture with a satisfied air.

"Barthélemy said it was very good, and I really think it is. Bon soir, mademoiselle; we shall see how the public like you on Monday."

He was turning away, when his eyes fell on another face. From the foot of his bed Mabel looked down upon him, and he fancied that her beloved features wore an expression of sad reproach. He glanced again at the other face, and for a moment he felt ashamed of having violated the sanctity of his love's presence by creating in it the embodiment of his fever-stricken, morbid imagination. But the next instant he turned away with a laugh, muttering—

"It's all for you, so you need not look so reproachful."

After which sophistic speech he went to bed, and tried to sleep.
CHAPTER III.

LA SALLE DE LA RÉALITÉ.

Mr. Baring kept his word, and on the Monday following Hubert's visit took his wife and Mabel to Bond Street to see what he called the show. The Academician was loftily condescending. He thought it extreme impertinence on Hubert's part to attempt to creep into public notice by any other means than through the wide portals of Burlington House. A pretty thing Art was coming to, when every young whipper-snapper could take a "gallery," and exhibit the rubbish which those who knew painting from daubing declined to hang
on the walls honoured by the memory of Reynolds and his compeers.

Connie was curious and nothing more, except that she thought it a little beneath Hubert's dignity to take shillings "all to himself," in that manner.

Mabel alone was anxious. She had been very subdued ever since Hubert's evening call upon Baring. She had an idea that something was wrong, and was looking forward to finding out what it was to-day; how, she did not know.

On entering Bond Street, Connie was the first to remark the boards which a string of sandwich-men were carrying.

"Oh, look there, Mabel!" she cried.

"Hubert's name!"

Mabel looked. Yes; there was Hubert's name, on a flaring poster.

"Victor Barthélemy and Hubert Durant's
New Gallery of Paintings. Salle de la Réalité."

"Ha! the young fool knows what he's about!" muttered Baring, as his eye, too, fell on the placard.

Mabel's heart beat strangely, as they paused to let some other people pass through the wicket when they had reached the place.

After crossing a tiny anteroom, darkened, and dimly lighted with gas, they pushed aside a heavy curtain, and came into another apartment, from which also the light of day was excluded. This room was draped with hangings of some sombre colour, and divided into little niches, each one curtained and railed off, and each one separately and brilliantly lighted by lights overhead; the spectator standing in the dark space outside, and looking at the
picture, which received its own special illumination from above.

There were only a few people, most of them men. The darkened atmosphere seemed to have made them shy of their own voices, for they all conversed in whispers.

Mabel saw and heard no one. She had come to a standstill before the first picture, and was looking at it with wide-open eyes. It happened to be the girl with the butterfly, and bore underneath it the title "La Revanche."

Two men were standing in front of it.

"Admirably painted! Quite Wiertz-like."

"Is that Barthélemy's or Durant's?"

"Durant's."

"Clever fellow he must be. Will make his way, I should fancy."
“Yes, if he doesn’t die in a lunatic asylum.”

“Pooh, my dear boy! This sort of thing is only a question of money. It’s not more than skin-deep with the artist, you may be certain.”

They passed on. After a moment Mabel did the same.

The next was called “Le Vent.” It was a blurred and misty canvas, on which at a first glance you could discern nothing at all. On looking more attentively, indistinct shadows of trees appeared, and single autumn leaves of very brilliant and varied colours seemed to be whirling about, all over the picture. It was, in fact, an attempt to paint the unpaintable; for, clever as it was, it needed the explanation of the title. In the left-hand top corner was the suggestion of a face, apparently just
looking round before disappearing. It was a weird, whimsical face, its hair blown straight out, and its features also seeming to follow the impetus of the blast; for eyes, nose, mouth, cheeks, were all inclined in one direction, producing an indescribable effect of half-freakish, half-rollicking movement. This work bore Barthélemy’s name, but Mabel never noticed that. To her the exhibition was all Hubert’s. There were several others, by both artists, which need not be described; and last of all, there was the picture of the marble Venus, with the jester at the foot of her pedestal.

Before this one Mabel stood longest of all. It was different from the others, and served to salve over a little the wound in her heart. It had been Hubert’s favourite; he had felt the true artist’s pang when it had been carried out of the studio, whereas
he had been almost glad to see the others go. He had painted the statue as Baude- laire describes it, standing in a large park, with trees and water in the background, the whole landscape steeped in hot and tranquil sunshine. Unconsciously Hubert had given the face a slight look of Mabel; though faint, the resemblance was there, and Monsieur Barthélemy, who was doing the honours of his gallery, and who happened to be standing where he could see Mabel as she looked at the picture, perceived it in a moment.

"Tiens!" he murmured. "C'est là sa Vénus! et lui, c'est le pauvre diable à ses pieds!"

If Hubert had not intended to reproduce Mabel's features, still less had he thought of doing so with his own; and yet the face of the gaily clad, huddled-up
figure at the base of the statue, with its piteous, wistful, lifted eyes, somehow sent a thrill through Mabel’s heart. She felt as if Hubert were unhappy, suffering, and had called her.

At the foot of the picture was the quotation —

"Ah! Déesse! ayez pitié de ma tristesse et de mon délire!"

"Well, Mabel," cried Connie at this moment, “did you ever, ever see such awful, hideous things?"

Mabel’s lips moved, but made no sound.

“Look, that man down there, with Stephen, is Monsieur Barthélemy, Hubert’s partner. He doesn’t seem mad, but he must be. Oh, they are coming this way.”

Barthélemy, hearing one of the art critics present address Mr. Baring by
name, and knowing that name to belong to a Royal Academician and Hubert’s brother-in-law, lost no time in presenting himself with all his customary *aplomb*. A few words of well-chosen praise of Baring’s work, coupled with an appearance of only moderate satisfaction with his own, soon disposed Mr. Baring in favour of Monsieur Barthélemy, and caused him to accept his advances quite graciously.

Barthélemy, who wanted to be introduced to Mabel, skilfully drew Mr. Baring to the picture before which the girls were standing.

“This, monsieur, I consider my friend’s best picture.”

“Well, Miss Moore, and what do you think of it all?” asked Baring.

“Madame your wife?” coolly inquired
Monsieur Barthélemy, although he had perfectly well heard Mabel's name.

Baring, who was not proof against the Frenchman's eel-like suavity of manner, introduced his wife and Mabel.

"My friend's sister!" exclaimed Barthélemy, who had gauged Constance some ten minutes ago. "I am indeed fortunate! And what, madame, is your opinion of our little exhibition?"

"I think it's horrid, all of it!" said Connie, with a quick little frown. "I'm nearly stifled, and the pictures make me feel ill!"

"And mademoiselle?" asked Barthélemy, looking curiously at the proud, beautiful face, the expression of which baffled him.

"I do not like them, except this one," Mabel answered coldly.

"Ah yes, this is sure to be a favourite,"
said Barthélemy, with a caressing glance towards the Venus. "But I am surprised that you do not care for the others. Ladies, as a rule, are so fond of the horrible."

Mabel looked at him scornfully; she was not going to be polite to this man, who, her instinct told her, was Hubert's evil genius.

"I know they think they must pretend disgust," said Barthélemy, nettled by her glance; "but it is all pretence. Women are far more morbid than men."

Mabel felt too disdainful to make any answer. Barthélemy began to be amused. No wonder Hubert was miserable, if this high and mighty young lady was his goddess.

"How do you like the Sara?" he asked.

"Oh, Monsieur Barthélemy," said Connie, "do tell us what it means. My husband doesn't know, nor do I."
“It is from a story of Balzac’s,” answered Barthélemy; then, looking at Mabel—“Mademoiselle is familiar with it?”

Mabel shook her head.

“I have never read anything of Balzac’s,” she said.

“Then I will explain to you. That is Sara, a Jewess, who was cursed by her father, a respectable but narrow-minded old Jew, for having become a ballerina. After her death she was delivered over to the evil one, who gave himself a good deal of trouble to invent a new and fitting punishment for so novel and grave a crime. He had at last an inspiration which did him credit. He caused his demons to erect a theatre which should resemble in every respect those wicked earthly ones in which poor Sara had danced away her salvation.
When it was ready, it was filled with an audience set free for the nonce, each from his or her own particular torment. These lost souls were allowed to taste once more the joys of fashionable attire, and to assist at a 'first night.' His Majesty Satan occupied the principal box. After two scenes of the play came the ballet. Sara, with several other ladies, or souls, who had followed the same vocation as herself upon earth, danced one after the other. King Satan, and of course with him the rest of the audience, applauded the others frantically; but when it came to Sara's turn, they all affected utter indifference, and made not a sound. She exhausted herself in efforts to please her new patrons, but all in vain—she danced in the midst of a profound silence. On going off—is it not so you say?—the poor girl had a violent
fit of hysterics. His Infernal Majesty was perfectly satisfied with the result of this new mode of torture, and since that time poor Sara dances all by herself, as you see her there in the empty theatre, the applause given to her companions ever ringing in her ears, with no orchestra to mark time for her, no one to admire her grace and her beauty. Voilà, mesdames,—do you think my friend has done justice to his subject?"

Barthélemy had told his story dramatically and well. Constance shuddered.

"How awful! Isn't it, Stephen?"

Mr. Baring shrugged his shoulders.

"Clap-trap, that's all. Come, Constance; I've had enough of this."

Barthélemy gallantly escorted them to the door. On the way Mabel turned her head, and looked at him with angry eyes.
“Did you persuade Mr. Durant to paint these things?” she asked almost fiercely.

Barthélemy bowed. “I plead guilty.”

“Then,” said Mabel, and her eyes glowed—“then—I think—I almost think you deserve a punishment as bad as Sara’s.”

She was gone. Barthélemy stood, with a comical look of surprise on his features.

“Sapristi! Quel petit démon que cette femme! What can she mean by that? I help her friend to make a name for himself, I do everything but paint his pictures for him, and then mademoiselle turns round and almost curses me! I must ask Durant for an explanation.”

Hubert, however, did not come near the place all day, and Barthélemy went round to the studio as soon as the gallery was closed.
He found a very pale and nervous-looking Hubert, pacing up and down the narrow limits of his room.

"Well?" he asked eagerly, almost before Barthélemy had got inside.

"Perfect, my dear boy. We've done the trick, I feel sure. But you should have been there."

"I couldn't. I—I was not well."

"Never mind. I have been there from the morning till now. And I am sure it will be a success. The critics were evidently impressed. I hope they will abuse us well!"

"Abuse us?" repeated Hubert, stopping in his tramp.

"Yes, abuse us. If they will only say that the exhibition is calculated to have a deleterious effect on public morals, and that no one, especially no woman, should
go near it, we shall have the place crowded."

"That sounds very cynical and nice, but I wonder if it's true?"

"True? Of course it is! Say a thing's improper, and you make its fortune at once. I could mention several instances where the popularity of a play, a novel, an exhibition has been started in that way. People go, read, look, because they think it 'right to see what we are coming to.' They are so conscientious that they will not condemn on other people's opinions. For a thing that is unanimously approved of by the press, there is always time enough—their friends can tell them all about it, in fact—but the other sort of thing—ah, cela doit se voir!"

"Well, we shall see," said Hubert, rather wearily. "Was any one there you knew?"
"Yes, several people. And I made acquaintance for myself with some one I did not know—your amiable brother-in-law—who had an air of having swallowed one of his own mahlsticks—his wife, and her friend, a Miss Moore. Do you know her?"

Hubert nodded.

"Ah—very pretty, but *what* a temper! Mon Dieu! she made me feel like a naughty little boy, I assure you."

Hubert stopped again and looked at him.

"How? Why?"

"Why—*Ma foi*, Hubert, you are not very hospitable to-night. You've never even offered me a pipe."

Hubert supplied his friend somewhat impatiently, and then repeated his "How?"

Barthélemy threw himself into the only arm-chair of which Hubert's room could boast, stretched his long legs out before
him, and, after contemplating with apparently absorbing interest some splashes of mud on one of them, condescended to go on.

"Yes, your sister asked me for an explanation of Sara. By the way, mon ami, I think we had better have one printed to hand about; your English seem lamentably ignorant of their Balzac. Well, as I was saying, Mrs. Baring asked me for an explanation, and I gave them a short résumé of the story—very nicely told, I flatter myself. Miss Moore said nothing—neither bad nor good, about the picture—but when she was going, she turned on me, with eyes blazing like a fury's, and asked if I had persuaded you to paint those pictures. I admitted the soft impeachment, whereupon she informed me with the most adorable naïveté that I deserved
to be punished à la Sara! Ha! ha! I was amused."

"So that's how she takes it, is it?" Hubert said to himself. "Was that all she—they said?" he asked.

"Pretty nearly all. I don't know your brother-in-law well enough to understand whether he was pleased or not, but I suppose I shall soon find out, for he has asked me to his studio. I fancy Mademoiselle Démon is staying with them, so I shall have the opportunity of exchanging a few further amenities with her."

Hubert made a step forward. "Look here!" he said, with an ugly frown, such as Barthélemy had never seen on his face before. "I warn you now, once for all, that you are to take care how you speak of Miss Moore. You shall not sully her
name with your odious jokes and cheap witticisms."

Barthélemy looked up at the angry face above him with a queer little smile.

"All right, dear boy; all right," he said gently. "You need not look at me like that, nor need you use such violent language. I meant no disrespect to your sister's friend—you cannot really think so."

Hubert, disarmed by the other's coolness, felt rather ashamed of himself.

"All right, old fellow," he said. "Only, you know, you are so fond of talking cynically about women, and it always grates upon me."

Barthélemy twisted his features into a repentant expression.

"Forgive me, dear boy. Henceforth I will confine my conversation to the other
sex—except—except when fond memory should compel me to refer to my venerable grandmother. That, I trust, will not be offensive to you?”
CHAPTER IV.

"HE HAS SOLD HIS BIRTHRIGHT."

Mabel was thankful when they got home again, and she could escape to her room, to be alone and think.

Her mind was full of bitter disappointment and reproach. Her Hubert, to whom she had given all the best part of her soul for three years past, whom she had loved with all the strength of her nature, in whose genius and ambition she had believed and trusted, whose single-heartedness she would have staked her life on—he—he to degrade himself so—to
bring down his gifts to such a level, to sell his birthright so meanly, so irretrievably! One of her step-father's epithets recurred to her with singular force. "Mountebank"—that was what he had called Baring when Connie had married him. A mountebank! No; that was what Hubert was. Constance's husband would never have been so untrue to himself. She thought of Baring's "Saint Cecilia," and a dozen more things of his, and her whole heart went out in veneration to him, with whom Art was a divinity, and not a mistress, to be shamed and toyed with or sold at will. Baring kept his Art holy; Hubert had flung his into the streets, to be trampled and scorned of every passer-by. What despicable creatures men must be, when the desire for money could make them sink so low! She thought of her
step-father, who would cheerfully have left her mother and herself penniless, hungry, unclothed, so long as he himself was supplied with his own luxuries; she remembered the brother of a friend of her own, who had forged to obtain the money which he owed for cigars and jewellery; other instances where men she had known or heard of had lost themselves rushed into her memory. Money was at the root of all these failures, but none were so bad as Hubert's. She had built her faith so firmly on Hubert; how firmly, she had perhaps never realized until now, when, without any warning to soften the shock, her idol had tottered and fallen. She had thought him so strong—despondent, impatient, but still so strong! And all the time he was so weak that, at the first temptation, at the first word of a stranger weaker and
wickeder than himself, he had flung away Art, Honour—Herself!

Yes, Herself; for her faith was gone, and her love must go with it. She could not love where she could not respect; there could be no feeling in her for Hubert but contempt.

What a shame it was! The very excellence of his work showed how near the goal he had been—nearer even than she had known.

The unhealthy, gas-laden atmosphere of the place seemed still to oppress her; she got up, and threw open her window. No wonder he shut out the clear honest light of day from his exhibition—he did well at least in that!

She sat nursing her pain until it was time to go down to dinner. She would have begged off on the plea—a true enough
one—of headache, but that she feared remark, to-day of all days; so she bathed her eyes, which burned and ached although she had not shed a tear, and joined the artist and his wife.

Constance could talk of nothing else but of Hubert's pictures. She used up her stock of condemnatory adjectives, which was a large one; no one opposing her. Baring was inwardly a good deal surprised. He had not given Hubert credit for so much skill.

The morbidity of the pictures had not struck him from its unhealthy and dangerous point of view. His own imagination was not sufficiently powerful to be easily impressed. He thought the subjects of the paintings "catch-penny" and "clap-trap," and objected to the artificially-lighted arrangement as savouring of char-
latanism; but nevertheless he was fully alive to the cleverness and technical ability evinced, and his opinion of Hubert had greatly risen in consequence. Hubert’s soul and personality being of very little importance to him, it was not to be expected that he should take quite so tragic a view of the matter as Mabel.

When they went into the studio, Mabel walked up to Baring’s easel, and stood looking at the picture on it until her heart swelled near to bursting. Yes; this—this, and even more, was what she had foreseen, steadily believed in, for Hubert. She almost wished he had died—rather than so betray the genius that was not of his own creation, but only entrusted to him.

Baring saw that something was amiss, but had no idea of the real cause. Perhaps
she had been disappointed at not seeing Hubert.

"Ah," he said, coming up to her, "I shall never finish that."

"Why not?" asked Mabel, hoping he had not seen the tears which had at last risen to her eyes.

"Because I cannot find a face for my Rachel. A new model came this morning, of whom I had great hopes, but she was utterly useless. I could have painted her as an organ-girl, but as Rachel—no. It's a pity, but what can I do?"

"It is a great pity," said Mabel, absently. She was thinking of the girl's face; the low, animal face, with its scarred cheek, she had seen that morning.

"Yes, it's all the more pity, because I know a face which is exactly what I want."
"Why don't you paint it, then?" inquired Mabel, innocently.

"Because," said Baring, looking full at her—"because its owner is very selfish, and will not let me."

"You don't mean me?" Mabel asked, with a sudden perception of his meaning.

"I do mean you."

"But I told you——" murmured Mabel.

"You told me—after first consenting, by-the-by—that you had a superstition against sitting. Well, I haven't asked you again."

Mabel was silent. What did it matter now? She belonged to nobody. She had taken herself back from Hubert. Had she any right, if in the smallest way she could serve the Art she held so sacred, to withhold herself? Why had she refused before? She could hardly remember; she only
knew that there existed no reason for doing so now. She suddenly raised her eyes to Baring, who had been looking at her, and said—

"Mr. Baring, I will sit to you for Rachel's face, if it will help you."

Not a movement of a muscle, not the faintest light in his eye showed the triumph which Baring felt. He only smiled at her, and said very simply—

"Thank you."

"Only I haven't very much more time. I must go home next week."

"Oh, surely not?"

"I must. Mother will want me."

"Well, then, we must begin to-morrow. I hope I shall not tire you. But you are not like Constance; you know how to sit still. I have seen you sit still for an hour at a time, hardly moving a limb."
"That was very idle of me."

"Perhaps—but a very good quality in a sitter."

Constance bewailed her friend's consent most woefully.

"It is too bad of you both," she said, "her last week."

"You'll have plenty of me still, Connie," Mabel laughed.

"No, no; I know how it is when Stephen once begins."

"Well, good night, dear," said Mabel, and went to her own room. She had been too much overwrought to be able to stand Connie's peevishness just then.

Left alone with her husband, Connie cried crossly—

"It is a shame of you, Stephen. Why don't you keep to your professional models—horrid things!—and let my friend alone?
You know how little pleasure I ever have now, and it's Mabel's last—"

Baring turned fiercely upon her.

"Don't make a fool of yourself, Constance," he said, with a heavy frown. "Come, go to bed."

Connie flung out of the studio without deigning to say good night.

When she was gone, Baring drew a deep breath. At last! At last! How patiently, how wisely, he had waited for this! As indomitable as had been his desire, had also been his endurance. He felt like a traveller in the desert, who may at length slake the thirst which has been consuming him for what seems like years. He remembered the evening, long ago, before his marriage, when he had tried so vainly to reproduce the features he coveted, from memory. How utterly he had failed
—how resolutely he had determined to have them some day. That day had come; it was here. He had won at last—how or why he hardly knew, only that victory was his. How long would it be before to-morrow? Eleven hours. So long! How hard that it should be so long! He could have waited for months, years; but eleven whole hours! Would they ever pass? He shut his eyes, and tried to bring the face before him.

Yes; there it was, with all its varying expressions, now tender and sweet, now audaciously merry, now strong and resolute, again pensive and sad. How well he knew each change! He had studied them so closely lately. He thought of the soft, rounded curve of the cheek, of the perfect line of the lips, of the wonderful eyes, as deep and unfathomable as the sea.
He never understood Mabel's eyes. When they were cast down over book or work, she seemed to him only a very beautiful woman; but when once they were raised, whether they looked into his or past his, whether they were gay or sorrowful, he felt that they were incomprehensible. He had not their secret.

Well, unfathomable or not, at all events they were beautiful, and their beauty was to be his now; he was to satisfy his craving, his yearning, at last. He pulled out his watch again. Only five minutes since he last looked.

With a laugh at his own folly he threw some fresh coal on the fire. He was in no mood to go to bed just yet. He sat in front of the picture, forgetting to smoke, absorbed in the thought of to-morrow's joy.
And upstairs, Mabel, lying on her bed, was doing her utmost to spoil, if tears can spoil, the eyes which were at once so beautiful and so mysterious.
CHAPTER V.

A REFUSAL.

About three weeks after Mabel had consented to sit to Mr. Baring, Hubert Durant called one afternoon at Mr. Chesham's house, and asked for Miss Moore.

Mabel happened to be sitting alone in the drawing-room when Hubert was announced. A novel lay on her lap, but she had been idly staring into the fire instead of reading it. She started as the maid said, "Mr. Durant;" but by the time Hubert entered the room she was perfectly composed—outwardly, at all events.
She greeted him coldly, in a very different manner from the old one, and then said something about looking for her mother.

"No, don't go," said Hubert eagerly, as she turned towards the door. "I want to see you. I have something to say to you."

Mabel came slowly back. The expression on her face was not an encouraging one.

She sat down opposite the fire, in front of which Hubert was standing. She tried to say in an everyday tone, "What is it you want to say to me?" but her voice would not come.

Hubert stood and looked at her for a minute without speaking. It seemed to him that there was something different about her. Something was changed. It
was not that she had lost any of her beauty, for a pale cheek can be as pretty as a rosy one. Her hair was arranged as he had always seen it; she was as graceful and lovely as ever; and yet—

She seemed cold and embarrassed; but that was probably shyness. Of course she knew what "something to say" must mean between them. There was only one thing it could mean.

"Mabel!" he said, after that minute.

Mabel looked up quickly, and then down again without speaking. He had never called her by her Christian name before.

"Mabel, I have come—at last I am able to come: . . . You have known for many months how I have wanted to come before. And now—at last—"

He stopped. There came no answering thrill from her heart to his. Surely there
should be no need of so many words between lovers?

He drew nearer. Mabel seemed to shrink away; but that must be his fancy. They had always understood each other so well before. Why did he find it so difficult now to tell her?

"Mabel, you know that I love you. Will you be my wife?"

There was a pause. Then the reply came in almost a whisper—

"No."

Hubert started.

"No? Did you say No?"

Mabel bowed her head.

"Then why—why in Heaven's name have you—why did you let me think you loved me? For you did let me think so."

At last Mabel found her voice. She
lifted her head proudly, and with a look at him in which he read only scorn, and none of the pain which was in her heart, she answered bravely—

"Because I did love you. And I do not love you now."

Was he dreaming? He repeated her last words in a dull, stupid sort of way—

"You do not love me now. . . . How . . . Has any one come between us?"

"No—no one. It is your own doing. Did you expect me to care for you after you had so lowered yourself as to paint those—those things?"

"Mabel! Those things, as you call them, have succeeded far better even than I had dared to hope. Every one of them has sold, and I have work for a long time to come. Why should you say I have lowered myself—-?"
"You have—to the public taste for horrors. It is unworthy of an Artist."

"I entirely disagree with you. I have gone a little out of the beaten track, of course. I suppose that is what displeases you. No Grosvenor Gallery, no Royal Academy—but what does that matter? The Grosvenor Gallery and the Academy sent back my work time after time. I should have got on in the course of years, no doubt; but I wanted—I wanted to be a little happy as well as successful, Mabel."

The catch in his voice went through Mabel like a knife. But she hardened her heart. What did his grief signify to her? She did not love him.

"And now I... we... could be happy. I have nothing much even yet to offer you, dear; but you don't care for money, I know. Mabel, forgive me..."
it was for you . . . don't send me away."

Mabel shook her head.

"I do not love you," she repeated, in the same impassive voice she had used throughout their interview.

Hubert turned away from her and stood looking into the fire for a few seconds, during which Mabel could hear her heart beat. Presently he turned, and said as coldly as she had herself spoken—

"Good-bye."

"You . . . you . . . will come and . . . see us sometimes?" she asked in a rather more kindly way.

Hubert smiled bitterly.

"No. . . . Good-bye."

He was gone; and Mabel, instead of feeling very heroic and strong-minded,
only knew that she was the most utterly wretched and lonely girl in the world.

She sat where he had left her until the room grew dark and the fire almost burned itself out. It seemed cruel, and yet she was sure she was right. She could never have made him happy. One should be able to look up to one's husband. A brother, a son, may show himself weak and unstable, and a woman may love him still with the unreasoning, compassionate love that gives all, and is content with but little repayment in kind. Mabel knew that her own mother was weak; she knew that she had sacrificed her daughter to her husband, that she would at any time yield up her children's happiness and welfare if that husband put sufficient pressure upon her. And yet Mabel loved her mother very dearly—so dearly that she did not even
feel indignant or vexed with her, but only sorry for her. But in a husband she wanted something else. She had always been the stronger in her relations with her mother—now she wanted to lean herself, not always to be leaned against. She had always been so strong, and yet she felt so weak; she craved so for some strength which should not be hers, except in the sense that she could count upon it.

She could not marry a man who would be blown hither and thither by every wind that crossed his path. She knew how she had despised Hubert all these last days, and it had been bitter enough away from him; but with him—it would be impossible. They would both be terribly unhappy, and, therefore, it was better so.

The next afternoon, when she went to
see Mrs. Baring, she asked her if she had seen her brother lately.

"No," answered Connie; "we've not seen him since the evening he came up here, just before his exhibition opened. By the way, Stephen heard at the Academy, the other night, that that's doing exceedingly well. The pictures have become quite the rage."

"Yes; so I understand."

"Ah, Hubert knows what he is about, a very great deal better than I should ever have given him credit for," said Baring, who had come into the room. "He will make his fortune yet, if he sticks to this new style of his until people are tired of it."

"Let us hope that will be soon," said Mabel.

Baring looked at her and laughed.
“That’s the first time I’ve heard you say anything about those pictures,” he remarked; “you always listen, and say nothing. Then you don’t like them?”

“I abominate them,” said Mabel.

“Well, you couldn’t do otherwise. I am sure you are a true Artist at heart. You care for the legitimate thing, without going out of the way for the spurious—eh?”

Baring’s praise was sweet to Mabel. As Art was all she had to live for now, she liked to be called a true Artist by one who knew.

She looked up at him almost reverently. He had become a hero in her eyes of late days. She remembered, with a touch of shame, how swift she had been to judge him long ago, when she had first known him. She had criticised where she should
have listened in meek humility; she had wilfully closed her eyes to fact, and obstinately prostrated herself at the feet of a false idol.

Baring had the benefit of Hubert’s downfall. He could hardly do wrong now in Mabel’s sight.

She had no patience with Constance’s eternal complainings. Connie was married to a great man, a true Genius, and she grumbled because he ate cold mutton and was indifferent to his clothes!

She would have sat down to bread and water with Hubert; would have scrubbed his floor and patched his garments, if he had liked.

Baring had had the wish of his heart. Mabel had sat to him for his Rachel, and a very exquisite Rachel he had made of her. He had prolonged the sittings as
much as possible, painting very often at other parts of the picture, while Mabel imagined he was painting her, for the pure pleasure of keeping her face opposite him. In all the years—a great many now—that he had handled brush and palette, he had never known such absolute delight in his work as this. He had painted more perfectly beautiful women than Mabel, whose features most certainly were open to criticism, but never before had he seen a face which always, every time he tried to paint it, said more than the last time. Its changeableness was perhaps its charm. It was like painting a dozen women, one more bewitching than another. It seemed to him that he could have painted a picture with five or six female figures, each of which should be taken from Mabel, and every one of which should
be as unlike the other as Mabel herself
would be unlike them all.

He did not talk much to her while she
sat for him; and this silence was very
acceptable to Mabel, who never felt as if
she wanted to talk now. Her face changed
with her thoughts. Had Baring possessed
the key to her soul, he could have followed
them as the eye follows the passing clouds;
but souls were locked, chained, and barred
to Stephen Baring, and Mabel's in par-
ticular.

Constance flitted in and out of the
studio, although her husband would very
much have liked to forbid her the door, for
her constant aimless chatter disturbed and
irritated him greatly when at work. He
could not do this, however, so bore it as
best he could.

It chanced one afternoon, when Mabel
had been sitting to the artist, that Victor Barthélemy made his appearance. Baring had been a little surprised not to see him before, the French painter having seemed to him the kind of man whom it is far easier to invite than to get rid of. He had, in fact, somewhat repented his rash offer of hospitality, but, as the days passed and no Barthélemy appeared, had finished by almost forgetting his very existence. He was not best pleased to see him now, and was pretty frigid in his manner, even for Stephen Baring.

It would have taken a great deal more than Stephen Baring, however, to disconcert Monsieur Barthélemy. In less than five minutes he had examined most of the things in the studio, had criticized the picture on the easel, had paid Mabel a compliment, and was perfectly easy and at home.
"I am the bearer of a message from Mrs. Baring's brother," he remarked, as soon as Constance entered the room.

"From Hubert? He has not thought fit to come near us for a long while," Constance said.

"That has not been his fault, madame, He has been ill."

"Ill?" exclaimed Connie.

Baring's eyes were on Mabel; she neither started nor changed colour.

"Yes, madame, very ill," said Barthélemy, also with a glance towards Mabel. "He had overworked himself, I suppose. It has been a struggle to keep him alive, but he is better now; he has turned the corner, as the doctor says."

"But why—how could you not let us know before?" said Connie.

Barthélemy looked at her comically.
"Because—well, to tell you the truth, madame, he wanted perfect quiet—and—his room is so small, you see. I could do everything that was wanted myself, and there was no actual danger. Still, I had no time to write."

"But is he up now?"

"Yes; he is up now. My message was to bid you good-bye for him. He is going away to-morrow."

"Going away? And without coming to see me? How very strange! Well, Monsieur Barthélemy, you may tell him that if he doesn't care enough about me to think it worth while to let me know when he's ill, or to say good-bye when he's going away, I—I do. I think it's very horrid of him, and I shall go to-morrow to his rooms, and wish him good-bye for myself."
"He starts at six in the morning," said Barthélemy, imperturbably.

Connie frowned impatiently.

"Then I'll go this evening. You'll take me, won't you, Stephen?"

"Certainly not," answered Baring, with the quiet decision that Connie had learned not to question. "Your brother is not going away for years, I suppose?"

Barthélemy shrugged his shoulders.

"Qui sait? There's no telling where a man may go when a wo—fit of wandering comes over him. Durant is going away in his mistress's service."

"What do you mean?" asked Connie, quickly. "What mistress?"

"Why, Art, to be sure, madame," laughed Barthélemy. "She is the most inexorable mistress a man can have, as poor Durant, young as he is, has already
found out to his cost. Mademoiselle, too, I believe, is an artist,” looking mockingly at Mabel, “and can therefore sympathize with us all. *N’est-ce pas, mademoiselle?*”

Mabel gave him neither look nor answer. He took no offence, however, but sat down beside her with the most genial of smiles.

“In Paris we have several lady artists, mademoiselle. They run us very close sometimes.”

“Do they?”

“Yes. I know one in particular, a Mademoiselle Puységur, who will make her mark, unless I am very much mistaken. Have you ever exhibited, mademoiselle?”

Mabel shook her head.

“No? Never? That is a pity. Our friend Durant thinks highly of your
powers, and let me say that he is a good judge."

"Are you going away with Mr. Durant?" asked Mabel.

Connie had taken her husband out of the studio to speak to some one in the hall, and the two were left alone for the moment.

"No; worse luck. I remain here. He would rather be alone, and I have work to do. Do you know, mademoiselle, that you cut me to the heart the last, which was also the first, time we met?"

"I?" said Mabel, who had almost forgotten that she had ever spoken to him.

"Ah, you have forgotten? Yes; that is so like a woman. I wonder if a woman ever had a memory?" moralized Barthélemy.

"I never met one yet. Why, you were kind enough to tell me that I deserved eternal torment for having helped Durant
to paint, or rather to conceive, the pictures that are going to make a famous man of him."

"It was very rude of me," said Mabel, simply. "I had no right to speak so, but I was so—so disappointed."

"You expected Angels, Madonnas, Innocents, and all that sort of thing?" said Barthélemy, with a cynical smile. "But don't you think, mademoiselle, that those have been rather overdone? One can have too much of even a good thing, you know."

"I care nothing for Angels, or Madonnas, or Innocents," Mabel said somewhat warmly. "I was interested in—in my friend's brother, and I naturally hoped to see him paint something better than magic-lantern slides."

Barthélemy laughed a good deal more
heartily than Mabel approved of. She had not meant to say anything funny.

"Magic-lantern slides! Very droll; really very droll. Ah, mademoiselle, you are cruel in your sarcasm. But you are also unjust; for, although you may not be able to understand them, Durant's pictures are exceedingly clever, and show power—genius. They are not conventional, I admit, and of course you, who are English, shudder at the unconventional!"

Poor Mabel, who prided herself on her entire freedom from such prejudice, and who had always taken it as a compliment to be called unconventional herself! What a very objectionable person this Frenchman was! How could Hubert ever have made friends with him?

"Shall I give any message for you to Durant?" asked Barthélemy, glancing
towards the door, where Baring was just appearing.

Mabel flushed hotly. He was really more and more impertinent.

"Thank you," she answered stiffly. "Please tell Mr. Durant that I am very sorry he has been so ill—and—that I wish him a pleasant journey."

"And for this icicle poor Durant is breaking his foolish heart!" thought Barthélemy, as he watched Mabel begin to talk and laugh with Baring. "Well, well, there's no accounting for tastes!"
CHAPTER VI.

CHANGING.

Hubert went away without making any further sign, and Mabel settled down into the old monotonous life, all the more uninteresting now that the unacknowledged hope which had hitherto shone in the future was extinguished. There was nothing in front of her now—nothing. She would never love any one else. If Hubert was unworthy, at all events he was different from all the other men she knew. There was not one who could compare with him. She had an offer of marriage that
winter, which Mrs. Chesham would have very much liked her to accept. The man was just the right number of years older than herself, rich, and in a good position.

"You'll never have such a chance again," her step-father said disagreeably, when he heard that Mabel had refused John Lascelles. "What the man's thinking of I am sure I don't know, but this you may be sure of, he'll never ask you twice."

"I don't want him to ask me twice," Mabel answered, with her head in the air.

"Then what do you want?" inquired "dear George;" and no answer being forthcoming to this profound question, he felt that he had scored a point, and was triumphant.

Mrs. Chesham was not in her daughter's confidence. Not even to her mother could Mabel have laid bare that wound in her
heart, which she knew would be an unhealing one. Mrs. Chesham had never suspected her attachment to Hubert, and she was too absorbed in her husband's perennial woes and ailments to have any eyes or ears for the pale face and unaccustomed silence of the daughter on whose stronger arm she had always leaned. She loved Mabel dearly, but it was with the confident, looking-up affection of a child rather than with the all-intuitive, understanding love of a parent. Such natures as Mabel Moore's have often to pay the penalty of their strength in their own loneliness.

For some reason or another, Victor Barthélemy had lately taken to haunt the house. Mabel was annoyed at this. She did not like him, looking upon him as a kind of Mephistopheles who had borne
away her lover's soul. Barthélemy, however, declined to be discouraged by her evident coolness. He ingratiated himself with Mr. Chesham, and when once that side of the house was taken, there was no shutting the door any more. It was rather curious to see a thorough-going Bohemian, such as Barthélemy was, reeking of stale tobacco, and very often of garlic, who smoked a pipe in the street, and had probably never had a tall hat on in his life, sitting tête-à-tête with the punctilious and fastidious Mr. Chesham, talking patent medicines and detective stories with the utmost gravity, and apparently heartfelt interest.

He got on almost as well with Mrs. Chesham, who, indeed, would never have dreamed of objecting to any one who had the good fortune to stand well in her
husband's eyes. George's approval was the guinea stamp, the brevet mark of merit. Of Mabel he did not take much notice, speaking to her but seldom, and then with what either really was, or what she chose to fancy was, covert sarcasm, with almost a shade of contempt, which galled her, and made her glad to get out of his sight.

She still sat pretty often for Mr. Baring, who stood as high in her esteem as ever. She went up to the studio at least once or twice in the week; but, although her visits were so frequent, she saw less of Constance than before. She always went straight into the studio, as there was no time to lose in those short winter days, and Mr. Baring kept her closely to her work. Constance was, it is true, generally in the room more or less all the time, but they
could not talk much; and indeed, since Constance had found Mabel disinclined to receive her confidences, she had rather drawn back, and did not seem to want to talk to her friend "all by herself," in the old way.

Constance had somewhat changed, if any one had chosen to be observant enough to remark it. She was far less disposed to chatter than before. She would sit sometimes, for quite a long time, looking straight in front of her, with a listless indolence which aroused Mabel's impatience. Much of her sparkling gaiety was gone, and with it much of her charm. She often now seemed just a heavy-eyed, pale-haired, uninteresting young woman, whose little tactlessnesses and inanities appeared far more serious and provoking than those that had emanated from the
brilliant, butterfly, merry Connie of bygone days.

To Mabel her want of interest in her husband and his doings was perfectly unpardonable. She could not understand how any living being could live in one house with Mr. Baring, and have room left for any other subject of thought than Mr. Baring's work. She was greatly disappointed in Connie; for, though she had never had a very high opinion of her abilities, still she had certainly given her credit for more unselfishness and intelligence.

The one and only creature who sympathized with Mrs. Baring was Robson. Robson knew every corner of Connie's mind, far more thoroughly than Connie herself did. She knew, better than any one else, except perhaps a mother, could
have known, how much Connie suffered, how woefully short the realities of her married life fell of her young mistress's anticipations. All that had meant life to Connie was cut away from her. She was like a peacock or a parrot put into a coal-cellar. She was utterly at sea, and only grew more and more so as each day passed, bringing with it fresh annoyances, and taking away still another illusion.

The yoke of Mrs. Simes grew no lighter. All the energy in Connie's disposition was brought to bear upon this tyrant, but it was all expended in vain. Mrs. Simes went her own way, complacently serene in the consciousness of her own merit, and of her nephew's approbation. She treated Constance exactly like a spoilt and wayward child. The girl's often very bitter remarks made absolutely no impression
upon her; she did not even pity Baring for having taken to himself so discontented and unpractical a wife. Twenty thousand pounds were twenty thousand pounds, and even if she had been mistaken in Connie’s capabilities for learning the mysteries of housekeeping, the twenty thousand pounds were there still. With Robson Mrs. Simes was at deadly feud, but this she rather enjoyed than otherwise.

"I cannot and will not bear it, Robson!" Constance exclaimed one day, after a particularly annoying wrangle with Mrs. Simes.

"You’ve made your bed, my poor child," returned Robson, "and I’m afraid you’ll have to lie on it."

"But it’s simply intolerable! Who ever heard of a married woman being treated in the way I am? They behave exactly
as though I were a little schoolgirl. Would you believe it, Nurse, I had to ask Stephen for some money this morning, and he actually refused to give me any! He said I must have wasted what I had, and that I must bring him the account of it. I, who had all that money of my own!"

"My dear, perhaps you took Mr. Baring at a busy time, or perhaps you didn’t ask for it like——"

"A good little girl!" finished Connie. "No, I dare say I didn’t. Oh, if I only had some one to go to! If Hubert were in England, I would make him take me away; but I don’t even know his address. I think it’s very cruel of him to leave me so unprotected."

"Your husband should be your protection," said Robson, with a sigh.
"But he isn't. You know he won't listen to me. I am so miserable in this house! Why, you know, Robson, there isn't a room I can sit in except my own bedroom. The drawing-room's only half furnished, and Mrs. Simes talks about it for a week if I have a fire there. I don't wonder hardly any one comes to see us. I can't always sit in the studio, and where am I to go?"

"Don't you think, if you were to put it reasonable-like to Mr. Baring, that he would let you furnish the drawing-room?"

"I can try, and I think I will," said Connie, doubtfully, "but I am afraid it won't be much use."

That evening, accordingly, Connie followed Baring into the studio, instead of going up to her own room, as she had often done lately.
He got out a big Herodotus, filled his pipe, and sat down, without taking any more notice of his wife than if she had been a kitten.

Connie perched herself on the arm of his chair, and said, with rather an effort—

"Do put away that great book for a minute, Stephen, and let me talk to you."

Baring, with an air of resignation, closed his book, keeping his finger in to mark the place, and, speaking with his pipe between his teeth, said—

"Well?"

"It's about—I want to ask you——
Pah! how nasty your tobacco smells!"

"Don't sit into it, then," said the artist, shortly. "If it's about money, Constance, I told you this morning that I had none in the house. I sent it all to the bank yesterday."
"It is about money, then, and you must listen, Stephen. Do you know that there is no room in this house for me to sit in?"

Mr. Baring raised his eyebrows.

"I was under the impression that the house contained a dining-room and a drawing-room."

"Yes; but no one sits in their dining-room, and the drawing-room is only half furnished. It's that I want to speak to you about."

"I can’t afford it this year," said Baring.

"Then let me furnish it."

"By all means. I was not aware you had come into a fortune."

"I haven't," said Connie, warmly. "But I've plenty of money of my own, and I've never asked you for any of it before, Stephen."
"Oh, you are going to talk about 'my income' again."

"No, I'm not. I wouldn't ever want a penny of it if you made me comfortable, as you ought. It is shameful that you should make me put up with things that even a poor man's wife wouldn't have to. Any one would think we had hardly a farthing in the world. I have been thinking, and I've determined that in future I'll have a cheque-book, as I used, and spend some, at least, of my own money."

This was a bold speech, and Connie quaked inwardly as she made it. Baring smiled a little.

"A cheque-book would do you no good, my dear. I am afraid you somehow rather misunderstand matters. I will explain them to you once for all."
He took out his pipe, and looked attentively into the bowl of it. Then he began, slowly—

"When you married me, you had a fortune of twenty thousand pounds. You were of age, and had managed your own affairs for some little time. I naturally concluded, as you said nothing about having a settlement of your money made upon yourself, that you had sufficient confidence in me to be sure I should not waste or misspend your money. This was my opinion, if I gave the matter any consideration at all; but, to tell the truth, it did not enter my head much. I didn't marry you for your money."

"Oh no, Stephen," said Connie, hastily;

"I never thought you did."

"When a woman marries without a settlement, her property passes from herself
to her husband. When you married me, your money became mine."

"Then I haven't any?" asked Connie, in astonishment.

"Not a farthing," returned Baring, blowing two or three perfect rings of smoke.

"Why didn't you—why did nobody tell me?" cried Connie, angrily.

Mr. Baring shrugged his shoulders.

"My dear, it was nobody's business. You were not a child. But there is no need to be distressed, Connie; I am always ready to give you anything in reason. I only thought it best to let you know how things really stand."

"Then—I may have the money for the drawing-room?"

"No; I cannot afford it this year."

"And the other money? Will you give me an allowance?"
“An allowance? Oh, it will be far better for you to always let me know what you want, and then I can give you a cheque.”

Connie looked hard at the face just below her own. Baring smoked on, his eyes, with the heavy brows contracted above them, fixed abstractedly on the opposite wall, as though his mind were far away, ignoring such trivial matters as those they had been talking of.

“Stephen——” she began, then stopped.

Mr. Baring yawned, without taking the trouble to put up his hand to his mouth.

“Stephen, you—you are not going to be unkind to me, are you?”

Mr. Baring took his eyes off the wall, and looked at Constance with an expression of surprise.

“Unkind to you, my dear? I unkind?”
Why, I don't think I was ever unkind to a single person in the whole of my life."

Connie's lip quivered.

Mr. Baring patted the shoulder nearest him, and then pushed down the tobacco in his pipe.

"Run away now, little girl," he said lightly, "or else get something to do. I must look up some facts in this big book."

Constance got down, and slowly went away to her own room, feeling that she had gained nothing. And yet—and yet—he was not unkind. Oh no; you couldn't say he was unkind. But she was very miserable, for all that.

The big book kept its facts to itself for some time longer after her departure. Baring sat where she had left him, looking straight in front of him, with no very pleasant expression on his face.
"I was a fool," he was thinking, "a downright, utter fool; and so was that old aunt of mine, who couldn't let me alone. Here I am, tied for life to this infernal little doll, when I might have been free and comfortable. I might have married the other girl. She may not be as sweet on the surface as my little idiot of a wife, but there would have been some satisfaction to be got out of her, and she would have been of great use to me. I'm not sure that she wouldn't outweigh Constance's twenty thousand pounds. However, what's done's done, I suppose. Mrs. Baring, for all her boasted daintiness and delicacy, is as strong as a young horse, and won't give me the chance of taking a second wife, I'm afraid. No—she won't die. She will probably outlive me."

Thus, and a good deal more in the same
strain, did Constance's husband muse. Constance herself was being tended in an hysterical fit by Robson; Mrs. Simes, downstairs, was counting the bundles of firewood. Truly, there were happier homes that evening than Stephen Baring's, Genius and Royal Academician though he was.
CHAPTER VII.

A SHORT FLIGHT.

Mabel was hard at work one morning in her own little room. It had seemed to her, after Hubert’s defection, that she would never have the courage to work again; but Time had softened this resolution, and one day she had found herself, brush in hand, with something of the old eager glow at her heart.

She had begun a picture which had been long in her mind, but which in her humility she almost feared to approach. Even now, although it was near to completion, no one
had seen it, and she was not sure whether she would dare to send it in to the Academy.

The subject was Antigone being reproached by Creon for having attempted to render the last sacred rites to her brother Polynices. There were only three figures—that of the guard who has acquainted Creon with his niece's crime, Creon himself, and Antigone. Mabel had taken the moment when Antigone says, in answer to Creon's question why she had so insulted her patriotic brother Eteocles by honouring the renegade Polynices, "My love shall go with thine, but not my hate."

Her Antigone was a noble figure, and Mabel had, although not to her own satisfaction, admirably caught the mingled expression of pride and tenderness which
the heroic maiden may be imagined to have worn.

Suffering is sometimes the seed from which effort and achievement spring. Perhaps Mabel's sorrow had lent impetus to her talent. Whatever the reason, she had certainly improved wonderfully, however far below her ideal she still might be.

She was standing, brushes and palette in hand, at a little distance from her easel, frowning discontentedly at her picture, when the door opened and Constance appeared.

"Connie!" said Mabel, mentally bidding adieu to her morning's work.

"Yes; it's me," said Constance, with her habitual happy disregard for grammar.

"Come in, dear. Wait; I'll clear a chair for you."
"If I'm disturbing you——" began Constance, in a dull, heavy way.

"Nonsense," said Mabel, cheerily. "I'm delighted to see you. There, now you're comfortable. Now tell me all the news."

"The news is," said Connie, "that—I've left Stephen."

"What did you say?" cried Mabel, turning round and looking at her visitor in dismay.

"I've left Stephen," repeated Connie, in the same curious, lifeless tone she had used ever since she came in.

"What do you mean? Left him—downstairs?"

"No; I have left him—come away from him. I am not going to live with him any longer."

"But, Connie," said Mabel, now seriously alarmed, "do you know—have you con-
sidered what you are doing? What can be the reason for such a sudden action?"

"It isn't sudden," Constance said sullenly. "It's been coming to this a long time past. I would have told you, only you never would listen."

"I didn't mean to be unsympathetic, dear," said Mabel, gently. "But, you know, it is not wise to interfere between husband and wife."

"I dare say not," returned Connie, bitterly; "not in the ordinary way. But Stephen isn't an ordinary husband—at least, for other women's sakes, I hope he is not."

"No, indeed; he is no ordinary man at all. You should be proud of him, Constance."

Constance smiled sadly.

"Ah, I don't mean what you mean,
dear. Certainly he is extraordinary in every way. But I don't mean to be the victim of his genius any more."

"Have you and he had a quarrel?"

"A quarrel? Many quarrels. But last night I made up my mind not to stand it any longer."

"What was the matter?"

"Oh, nothing much more than the old story. I cannot bear that girl Martha, whom Mrs. Simes is so fond of. She is not in the least fit to be in a gentleman's house. Last night she put only one bit—a bit, not even a whole one—of candle in my bedroom, and when I told her to get another, she said that Mrs. Simes said that was all I could have! Of course I went down to Stephen at once, and he actually sided with his detestable old aunt."
Constance had told her story rapidly, and with flushing cheeks.

"And are you really going to leave your husband's house for such a reason?" asked Mabel, who would have cheerfully gone to bed by a night-light if Genius had so willed it.

"Yes," Connie said, as bitterly as before. "I dare say it all sounds very trifling and paltry to you; but then, you see, this is only one of many things. It has become intolerable. Oh, why—why did I ever marry? I was so happy here."

She put her face between her hands and sobbed quietly.

"Where is Robson?" asked Mabel, who privately thought Constance a great goose, though she felt very sorry for her.

"Packing up my things. I came away so as to make sure. Stephen might have locked me up——"
At this moment the parlour-maid knocked.

"Come in," said Mabel.

"If you please, ma'am, Mr. Baring is in the drawing-room, and would like to see Mrs. Baring."

"Oh, Mabel, Mabel!" cried Connie, shrinking together in her chair, "he's come after me! Oh, hide me—hide me! Don't let him get at me."

"Be quiet, Connie," said Mabel, severely. "How can you be so silly! Your own husband! Any one would think poor Mr. Baring was an ogre. You'd better go down and see him."

"No, no!" said Connie, beginning the hysterical crying that Mabel had heard once or twice already. "I won't! I can't!"

"But you must, dear, I'm afraid."
"I would rather kill myself."

To Mabel’s great relief, Robson here entered the room. She looked pale and distressed, but at once took possession of Connie, who was now in a regular hysterical fit.

"What’s to be done, Miss Moore?" Robson asked. "Mr. Baring’s downstairs, and I’m afraid he’s terrible angry."

"Mrs. Baring says she will not go to him, but she must," said Mabel.

Robson looked pitifully at Constance.

"Poor lamb! Yes, I’m afraid she must. You see, he’s her husband."

"Exactly," said Mabel, thinking that it would perhaps have been better for Connie had she not had this faithful but somewhat prejudiced woman to encourage her in her dissatisfaction.

"Couldn’t you go down, ma’am," sug-
gested Robson, hesitantly, "and maybe just pacify him a bit? He did swear something awful."

"I dare say!" thought Mabel. "Oh yes," she answered; "I'll go down. But do try and get your mistress to be a little more reasonable, Robson. She can't go on being a child for ever, you know."

"Ah, ma'am," said Robson, looking at her with a shake of the head and a suspicious moisture about her honest brown eyes, "you're young, and you're a bit hard. When you've seen as much of life as I have you'll grow softer like, and'll understand better. But do your best with him, do Miss Mabel, there's a dear."

"Am I hard?" thought Mabel on her way downstairs. "I shouldn't like to be. I hope I am not."

Mr. Baring was pacing the drawing-
room with a very unhandsome scowl upon his face. He turned fiercely round as the door opened.

"What the devil—— Oh, Miss Moore. I beg your pardon; I thought it was my wife. She is here, is she not? I understood from that meddling old fool Robson that she was coming here."

"Yes; she is here," said Mabel.

There was a pause. Mabel felt embarrassed, and did not know how to begin her work of pacification.

"A pretty pass she has brought things to with her folly!" said Baring, angrily, presently.

"I am very sorry," Mabel ventured.

"And what is it all about? A lot of childish nonsense—nothing more. It's too ridiculous to talk about—to tell you of. And here am I, wasting my time and the
daylight. It's enough to drive a man mad."

"It is very sad," said Mabel, gently; "but I think you will not be so angry, Mr. Baring, if you remember how much Connie has always been allowed to have her own way. You know, she is almost a child in some things."

"I know that she is my wife, and that I have to live with her," returned Baring, doggedly. "She must leave off her childish ways now. I can't put up with them. Where is she? I am going to take her home."

"Couldn't you—won't you leave her with us for a few days? I don't think she is very well, and perhaps—"

"No; she shall have none of her own way. She shall come back to my house at my bidding now, to-day."
He spoke masterfully, and Mabel could read no signs of yielding on his stern, pale face. She said timidly, feeling that she had failed in her mission—

"Cannot you wait a little? I am afraid she is hysterical."

Baring gave a short, savage laugh.

"Oh, Constance’s husband has had to become familiar with hysterics. I know all about them. Perhaps I can go up to her—can I?"

"Ye—es," said Mabel, inwardly dismayed at the idea of Baring’s entering her little room, but not exactly knowing how to refuse.

She led the way up. On the stairs Constance’s half laughing, half crying became distinctly audible. Baring uttered an exclamation under his breath.

When the door was opened, Robson was
seen applying her usual alternatives of scolding and coaxing.

"Take that—woman away, please, and leave me with my wife," Baring said angrily.

Constance, at the sound of his voice, cowered into her chair and wept still louder.

Robson, sorely against her will, was obliged to go out of the room, with one last whispered admonition to her mistress.

When Mabel and Robson had gone, Baring walked up to his wife, and, laying a heavy hand on her shoulder, said in a voice Connie had never heard from him before—

"Stop that!"

Connie caught her breath for a moment, and then gave a wild scream of laughter, and went on again.
“Stop that, you little devil, I say!” repeated Baring, giving his wife a rough shake.

Connie somewhat lowered her tone, but sobbed as bitterly as ever.

Baring took hold of her arm, and pulled her out of the chair.

“Stand up!” he said between his teeth, and Constance found herself able to stand.

He stood in front of her, with a hand on either shoulder, a hand that pressed heavily and pained her.

She kept her eyes obstinately upon the ground, so as not to meet his, which she knew were fixed upon her face. After a minute or two she left off sobbing out loud, and only her tear-stained features and heaving bosom bore witness to the late tempest. When she was quiet, Baring
pushed her into her chair, and took another himself.

He gave a contemptuous look at her, as she sat huddled up, the very image of limp despair, and then, while waiting for her to grow quite calm, he proceeded to make an inspection of the room. He had quite recovered his own temper by this time.

The picture on the easel at once arrested his attention.

"By Jove!" he muttered, and going nearer, examined it closely. "This can never be that girl's work, surely! It's really uncommonly good; only—— Yes, I must show her that."

Opening the door, he called, "Miss Moore!"

Mabel quickly obeyed the summons. She was not far off.

"Have you—is she—oh, is she ill?" she
exclaimed as she caught sight of Connie's prostrate form.

"Oh, she's all right," said Baring, impatiently. "That's not what I called you for. Look here, Miss Moore; is this your work?"

"Yes," answered Mabel, amazed at this sudden transition.

"Well, I congratulate you. It's really very good indeed—excellent. But this girl's arm is out of drawing. Here, don't you see?"

He took up a brush, and in a few minutes had put the defective arm right enough for Mabel to go on with.

"I had no notion you painted as well as this; I'm quite surprised," said the artist, exactly in his usual tone. He seemed to have forgotten all about his wife.

Connie raised herself, and began pinning
up her disordered hair. Her movement attracted Baring's notice; he turned round with a quick frown.

"Put on your bonnet and come," he said. "I've got a cab at the door. You must let me see this again, Miss Moore. Of course you are going to send it in?"

"If you think it has a chance," murmured Mabel, helping Connie on with her mantle.

"A chance! Yes, that it has. Now, Constance, are you ready?"

Constance docilely followed her husband downstairs, and got into the waiting hansom.

"You can tell that precious old woman to take an omnibus back," were Baring's parting words; "and mind, now, that you don't go and spoil that Antigone of yours."
CHAPTER VIII.

AN ABRUPT DISMISSAL.

Baring said not a word, either good or bad, to Constance as they drove home. At first he was thinking more of Mabel's picture, which had really surprised him, sceptic as he was with regard to women's work in art. Perhaps his astonishment inclined him somewhat to overrate the merits of the picture; it was so much for a woman to have achieved anything at all worth looking at.

A stifled sob from Constance recalled him to other matters. He gave a sidelong
look at her. She was very pale and woe-begone, and sat staring with lack-lustre eyes at the horse's head in front of her.

Baring felt his anger rising anew. It was quite too absurd that his time should be wasted in this manner. Over and over again he mentally cursed his own folly. He did not attempt to analyze the situation; that was not his way. Things either were or they were not. Why they were, or whether they could be altered, was not his affair. By going straight ahead, he divested life of many of its most complex problems, and saved a good deal of the time and energy, of which less happily constituted minds are so lavish.

When they reached home, he said, as he put his key into the door, after leaving Constance to crawl unaided out of the hansom—
“Come into the studio; I want to speak to you.”

Constance meekly followed him. She was in a desperate fright.

Baring waited until she had removed her outdoor things and sat down, then, drawing up another chair, he placed himself astride on it, so that his face, resting on his arms folded on the back, directly confronted hers.

“And now,” he began in a very quiet voice, the tone of which nevertheless sent a shudder all through Connie—

“now, perhaps, you will be good enough to explain the meaning of this behaviour.”

Connie looked down at her lap, nervously twisting her fingers together.

“I am waiting,” said her husband, after a minute.
"You know why I went away," she got out with an effort.

"No."

"I told you last night I couldn't bear it any longer."

"Because I said my aunt was not to blame for taking care of my property?" said Baring, contemptuously. "An excellent reason for leaving your husband and making a fool of him."

"I can't bear it any longer," repeated Connie.

"Bear what?"

"The life you make me lead. Let me go away, anywhere, with Robson, and live by myself, if you don't like me to go to the Cheshams."

"Look at me, Constance," said Baring.

Constance raised her head, but dropped it again directly she met the gaze of those
dark eyes, which seemed to glow and radiate as with some hidden fire. Baring laughed sarcastically.

"What a wretched little coward it is! Do you think I am going to bite you?"

"N—no," answered Constance. She was half afraid he might be going to strike her.

"Come, then, look at me."

Constance pulled herself together, and managed to keep her eyes—poor, tear-brimming, weary blue eyes that they were—on her husband's face.

"That's right," said Baring, looking full at her until she began to tingle all over. "Now listen, Constance. I haven't either the time or the disposition for these continual disputes. I am a busy man, and ought to be able to keep my mind free for my work. I have long since found out
that you take no interest in my work. What is it you do take an interest in except your scent and your clothes? You refuse to help to keep my house. If you had your own way you would have ruined me with your extravagance before now. I have never known a person like you in my life. What was it you married me for?"

He stopped abruptly. He was not in the least degree moved; he was only girding at the loss of his precious moments.

The tears welled over, and rained down Connie's cheeks. Twice her lips parted to speak, and twice her voice failed her. Her throat was dry and contracted. At last she murmured—

"I loved you, Stephen, and I thought you loved me."

Baring put up his hand to his mouth.
AN ABRUPT DISMISSAL.

"You loved me! But, great heavens, where are the proofs of your love? Have you ever, since you entered this house, given yourself the least little trouble about me? But it's no use discussing these matters. I only want you to understand that I will allow nothing and nobody—do you hear?—nothing and nobody to come in my way. You talk of going to live by yourself. I will not consent to that. You are my wife, and you shall live in my house and behave as a wife should."

Terrified as Constance was, she found sufficient courage to shake her head and say—

"I cannot. I shall die."

Baring looked at the plump cheeks and rounded form before him.

"No, you won't die. You must accustom yourself to your life."
"I wish I were dead now!" said Connie, beginning to sob again.

Baring paused for a second. He was inwardly echoing the wish. Then he looked at his watch.

"Now, you see, it is two o'clock already, and I have not done a single stroke of work to-day. That won't do, you know, Constance. And even now I have not finished."

He threw back his head, and looked up at the ceiling for a full two minutes, at the end of which he said—

"I know, Constance, from whom the spirit of rebellion that is so strong in you comes. It is from that absurd woman Robson. I can quite understand that she does not find my small household so comfortable as your aunt's, or even Mrs. Chesham's, where expenditure was lavish."
But I must look after my own interests; and therefore, as I married you and not Robson, Robson must go."

Connie stared at him in such astonishment that she forgot to be afraid.

"Robson go! Are you mad, Stephen?"

"I hope not. Yes, Robson must go."

"Go! Why, I have never been without Robson in my life!"

"Nor need you have been, if you had chosen to behave properly."

"Stephen, you cannot mean it?"

"Constance, I not only can, but do."

"Do you want to kill me?"

"No; I only want you to be reasonable."

"Stephen, I won't go away; I will never say another word about Mrs. Simes or anything; but leave me Robson."

Mr. Baring stood up and stretched himself.
"No, Constance. You should have taken care how you pushed me to such a point. I am resolved now; and when I have once made up my mind—"

He rang the bell. When Martha appeared, he asked—

"Has Mrs. Robson returned?"

"Yes, sir."

"Ask her to come here, will you?"

When Martha had gone, Constance started up, and clutching at her husband's arm, cried—

"Stephen, Stephen! have mercy! Forgive me! Oh, leave me Robson!"

Mr. Baring put his arm round his wife and led her back to her chair.

"Now sit there," he said in an intense, quiet tone. "Don't dare to stir."

Robson came in at this moment.

"Mrs. Robson," said Mr. Baring,
abruptly, "as Mrs. Baring has no further occasion for your services, I shall be glad if you will leave to-day. I will pay you your month, of course."

The blow was an entirely unexpected one. The woman turned white, and looked at Connie in a bewildered way.

"You heard what I said?" inquired Mr. Baring. "How much do we owe you?"

He put his hand in his pocket.

Robson’s habitual self-control and restraint before her superiors prevented her from showing all she felt. She said, in a low voice—

"Do I understand you aright, sir? You are going to part me from Miss Connie?"

"No, from Mrs. Baring," said the artist, coldly.

"Twenty-three years I have been with..."
her—the whole of her life. Oh, sir, don't do it! She is but young yet, and so inexperienced. She will grow wiser in time—"

"Yes, I hope so, but it must be without your help. Come, my good woman, you are wasting my time."

Robson's eyes flashed.

"You are turning me out, then, sir? And I am to say good-bye so to my child, whom I have loved as much as any mother ever loved her own child? Miss Connie, can't you say nothing?"

Connie raised a deathly white, imploring face towards her husband. Mr. Baring went up to his easel, and wheeled it into a corner, to make room for another.

Robson ran up to her mistress, and folded her in her arms.

"Oh, Robson! oh, nurse! I shall die!"
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whispered Connie. "Oh, say you won't go! Don't leave me!"

Robson held her close; but, however hard it was, she knew that hers was the losing side. Baring had might and right on his—submission was inevitable. For her nursling's sake, she must make it as easy as she could.

"My darling, my darling," she murmured, "don't you give way. I'll never go far from you; I'll be near you and watch over you."

She put her faithful hand on Connie's head as she spoke, and at the thought that those shining coils of hair would be tended by her no more, she broke down, and sobbed as bitterly as Connie herself for a moment. But only for a moment. Then, with one long, last clasp, she freed herself from Connie's clinging arms, and stood up.
She told Baring what was owing to her in tones almost as cold and self-contained as his own, took the money, and, with a parting, lingering look at her foster-child, she walked out of the room.

Constance lay helpless in her chair. She felt utterly dazed. What was she to do now? Her imagination was not a particularly vivid one, but nevertheless it showed her a future of utter desolation and despair. Life without Robson! One might as well have cut off Connie's hands and feet at once. How was she to brush and arrange her hair? Who would see to her clothes, patiently and untiringly obeying every whim and fancy? And who, oh who, would comfort her now?

Servant and comparatively uneducated woman though Robson was, she had in some measure been her young mistress's
soul. Without her, Constance would have been rudderless all these years, at the mercy of every wind that blew; deprived of her now, she would be entirely forsaken.

Love had for some few brief days given to this poor little Undine some faint semblance of a soul of her own. During her short engagement, there had been flutterings and vague instincts in her hitherto childish bosom, which, carefully and tenderly nurtured, might in time have blossomed, and have even come to fruition. Her fitful attempts at learning to draw, her painstaking interest in picture-galleries, had been indications of the change that love had begun, and which love alone could have carried to perfection.

But timid, inexperienced love like hers wanted the most zealous attention, the soft and genial air, the even temperature of
a hothouse. Instead of this, the poor awakening Psyche had been rudely banished to Arctic regions, where it had quickly folded its wings, and sunk quiescent under a deadly and annihilating burden of ice.

Constance had soon ceased to love her husband, or to consider him in any other light but that of a gaoler. Robson had been her only stay, her one safeguard. So long as her faithful nurse was there, she felt herself protected, taken care of. But Robson gone, she might as well be dead. Her husband, whether intentionally or not, had succeeded in impressing her with a sense of physical fear. She was afraid of his striking her, though nothing was probably further from his thoughts.

She did not see how she was to go on living without Robson. It was evidently
no use to run away. Mabel was the only person she could go to, for she had no money to go into lodgings by herself. But Mabel would take Mr. Baring's part—she always did; and even if Mabel would let her stay, Mr. Baring would soon find her out, and fetch her away. What an awful thing it was to be married! She wondered if all, or many, women had to suffer as she did. In novels it was so very different; there the man was always at the woman's feet, it was she who commanded. How ready she had been to marry Stephen! How proud she had been that he had chosen her! And how she had tried, really tried, to fit herself to be an artist's wife! She looked at her husband as he stood quietly working, and experienced almost a feeling of repulsion as her eyes travelled over his tall, well-knit figure.
He did look like a gentleman, or would, if he were properly clothed. She could never have married a Bohemian, like Monsieur Barthélemy, or a common-looking man. But, oh, how dreadfully shabby his clothes were! Not carelessly shabby, as a country gentleman's might be, but sordidly, meanly shabby. From his clothes she wandered to his face. He had his "working look" on—a stern, concentrated, piercing look, which Connie somehow fancied was like the expression a judge would wear while condemning a prisoner to death.

He seemed so far away from her. She was no more than a piece of furniture in his house; he did not care for her society, or take the trouble to disguise that he thought her foolish and troublesome; why, then, would he not let her live her little
life in peace? She would not have asked for much; only to have proper clothes, and a drawing-room where she could have received her friends, and a decently appointed table, and—and—perhaps a carriage. Of course, with her money and Stephen’s position, she had thought they would have a carriage. And she would not have been exacting even about that. One horse would have done quite well, and no footman. Then she could have made plenty of nice friends, and have enjoyed herself as she used. And what harm would it have done him? He was worried and vexed now because she resented being kept like a pauper; he said her temper interfered with his work. Well, then, why not better matters, when it could be done so easily, without even the smallest exertion on his part? Could it be that he was really fond
of money—of money for its own sake? Constance had a superb disregard for money; she considered it common and bad form to give any thought to it. To know that her fortune was accumulating comfortably would have afforded her no satisfaction whatever; she liked to be able to gratify every whim and fancy of her own, and of others too, when she noticed them; but the pleasure of hoarding was unknown to her, and even when she suspected it in her husband, it only seemed "funny" to her, and nothing more.

When she had done looking at him, she settled herself more comfortably in her chair, and began to think of what lay before her. Would he let her have another maid? A few months ago she would have taken this as a matter of course, but Baring had sufficiently broken her in for her to
have grave doubts on the subject, and to dread broaching it to him. Perhaps she had better try what she could do alone for a day or two, and when Stephen had got into a more kindly temper, she might ask him then.

Poor Constance! Her frills and her hair were what occupied her mind. The real questions of her life never even presented themselves to her. How she and her husband, as man and as woman, were to carry on the years together; whether her duty was to force herself into his groove, or to attempt to soften him to her own way;—to these things she never gave a thought. Her only wish was to secure some pleasure and ease for herself. If she could not have much, she would do with little; but some she must have. Even her grief for Robson was selfish, and had more to do
with what Robson had done for her than with Robson's own personality.

Mr. Baring waited until his keen ears caught the sounds which told him that Robson and her boxes had gone, when he said to his wife—

"You had better go, Constance; I am expecting a model."

Constance got up, swept her things together, and departed with an air which she intended to be very dignified, but which her husband never even noticed.

As soon as the door had closed behind her, Baring threw down his brushes and began to walk up and down the studio.

He, too, regretted his marriage—at least, he was almost sure he did. He would not have liked to part with the money which had made the marriage, though. The pill was unpalatable, still it was a gilded one.
How stupidly fate arranges things, he thought. Why could not Mabel Moore have had twenty thousand pounds instead of Constance? What a delightful wife she would have made! She was the very antithesis of Constance. He was sure she would have suited him perfectly. Constance was not any use even to paint from, whereas Mabel——

And yet, charming girl though Mabel was, she did not seem likely to marry. At one time he had thought that she cared for that young fool, Constance's brother, but he had done for himself with his Salle de la Réalité. Mabel was wasted where she was; she would grow into an old maid, and lose her beauty before its time. What a pity she could not come and live with them! She could take care of Constance, and keep her in order, and sit to him, and
do the housekeeping; for he was sure she would do it as well as Mrs. Simes, and she would certainly be much more ornamental. But, of course, there was no chance of that. Or if only he had not married; or if only—- Yes, if only Constance would die!

Perhaps—who knew?—she might have some illness which would carry her off and leave him free. There were so many contingencies. One was always hearing of accidents, or fatal sicknesses; but they were just the sort of things which happen to other people, and not to one's self. Constance would probably live on, hale and strong, and dance to her second wedding over his grave. Stupid little creature! Was there no chance for him? Could he not shake himself free?

He sat down in the chair his wife had
so lately occupied, and stared into the fire. What could he do? If Constance were once out of the way he could marry Mabel. That Mabel would marry him he had not the slightest doubt. He was quite sure she liked—perhaps more than liked him. How pretty she was! How altogether charming!

Here Mr. Baring forgot himself for a few minutes in the remembrance of Mabel's face. It was such an enigmatic face! Other faces were so easily learned—but hers! He thought he knew it so well, and yet, every time he saw it, it brought him fresh surprises.

Mr. Baring was not of a poetical turn of mind. He did not liken Mabel's face to the sea—ever changing, yet always the same. Her mouth was a mouth to him, and not a pomegranate bud. Her ears never made
him think of a shell. Her eyes were not stars, nor magnets, nor jewels; they were merely eyes. No similes of any kind occurred to him. He only felt that she was very beautiful, with an incomprehensible, ever-fresh beauty, which was unlike anything he had known.

As a moment before he had reproached Fate, now he began to upbraid custom. What a shame it was there should be this beautiful girl in the world, who would be the very completion of his life, and that he should be so inexorably divided from her, just because he was married already! How absurd it was that a man should have to marry everybody he admired!

Baring would have been quite content, for his own part, to have had Mabel an inmate of his house, as things were. It was neither his principles nor his con-
science that would have troubled him; it was simply the opinion of the world. He would have sacrificed a thousand Mabels to himself and to his Art. No priest of Moloch or Bel ever knew less compunction than Stephen Baring when his Art, which was identical with himself, was in question. It seemed to him a matter of course that he should have what was necessary and right for the furtherance of his work. He would have been quite capable, like the Greek painter of old, of thrusting a knife into the breast of a man in order to study his dying agonies; it would probably not even have occurred to him that he was cruel. Mabel’s honour, Mabel’s reputation, Mabel’s peace of mind and self-respect—what were they but fit sacrifice for Genius!

But however willingly Mr. Baring would have offered them up, he knew...
that it was absolutely impossible for him to do so. Two things stood in his way: first, Mabel herself, who, he had sufficient discernment to see, would never be false to herself—not that the artist put it in that way—and, secondly, his own fear of scandal. Mr. Baring cared very much what the world thought of him; a great deal more than people gave him credit for. He was wholly indifferent whether he followed the fashions in his clothes or his table; for he was quite aware that a successful man may arrogate to himself as many eccentricities as he chooses, without incurring the blame of Mrs. Grundy. He could allow himself to be called miserly, careless, Bohemian, erratic; that was all very well. None of those terms clashed with his pictures. If he were careful of money, negligent of his person, it might
be that he gave to the poor in secret—no one could say that he did not. But if ever a breath of scandal touched him, that would be a very different thing. The painter of Madonnas, saints, and Biblical subjects an unprincipled and loose liver! That would never do.

Having reached, by a somewhat less self-analytic road, this point in his reflections, Mr. Baring poked his fire into a blaze, and returned to Constance.

Constance was in the way. How was he to get rid of her? He felt aggrieved that she should be in his way. What business had she, an insignificant little animal, to count as an item of any moment in so important a life as his? It really was unfair and absurd. It was all his aunt Simes’s fault. Still, there she was, and what was to be done with her?
That something must be done was evident. Mr. Baring was not the man to sit down quietly and wait. If events did not shape themselves, he must give them a helping hand. Quite calmly and reasonably, he went through the various modes of escape open to him.

Violence was not to be thought of. He was not going to run himself into danger. Poison was out of the question for the same reason. He knew too little about the fatal agents which destroy life to risk having anything to do with them. But how, then? How?

He sat, absolutely motionless, buried in thought, his brows contracted, his eyes fixed on the fire. The minutes passed—stretched into hours—and still Stephen Baring sat turning over in his mind the knotty problem. It was not until the
studio had become dark, and the fire had burned low, that he raised his head with a smile which told that he had found a solution.

He put coals on the fire and lighted the gas; then sat down and wrote a letter, which he took to the post himself, afterwards returning to the studio, and working away with redoubled ardour until dinner-time.
CHAPTER IX.

CANDID CRITICISM.

Mabel felt greatly encouraged by Mr. Baring's praise of her picture. When he and his wife had driven off, she returned to her room, and stood for a while, fondly looking at her work. To be so praised by him, the master of masters! It was enough to make her sure of herself—not vainly so, but sure that if she only worked hard enough, she would attain to something.

Poor Mr. Baring! It was hard that Constance should have turned out sillier than even Constance had any right to turn
out. Imagine being dragged from the beautiful creations of one's fancy to fetch back one's runaway wife in a hansom! Surely it would be wiser, if only for his own sake, to supply her with tons of candles and acres of looking-glass? It was a pity that Hubert was not there to bring his wilful little sister to reason.

Hubert! The thought of him sent a shock through her; she looked at her picture with tearful, wistful eyes, and her hand involuntarily went to her left side, as if to press back the pain which gave a fresh throb as she remembered. Hubert was gone—vanished from her life. If she succeeded with her Antigone, her triumph would be hers alone, and therefore comparatively worthless. Hubert had diverged from the path they once had followed together; he was lost to her sight for ever.
Why had he not stayed with her? Why had he been so weak? Had he not Mr. Baring's glorious example before him? Had he not been certain of her love? Could he not have waited just a few little years, so short in comparison with those long, never-ending years she must live through now, until the legitimate reward of legitimate toil should reach him? He would have been so proud of her success! They could have worked together so beautifully. Oh, how short-sighted, how faint-hearted he had been!

And she had been right—she was convinced she had been right in acting as she had. It was curious how often she found it necessary to reassure herself of this fact, but she was none the less absolutely certain.

Monsieur Barthélemy continued to visit
his friend Mr. Chesham as assiduously as ever. Mabel frequently wondered whether he really took a pleasure in her step-father's society. It seemed to her so incomprehensible that any one should voluntarily talk to "dear George." But Victor was not George's step-daughter, and Mr. Chesham did not therefore think it a sacred duty to make him feel that he was the chief of sinners. On the contrary, he was far more genial and sympathetic with the Frenchman than he had ever been with any one before. Barthélemy was so amusing; he was as good as a number of Punch. And then he had so sensible a perception of Mr. Chesham's woes and ills; he took them all so seriously. There was also a delightful novelty and excitement in trying the curious drugs and preparations which
Victor procured from a French chemist, a friend of his, and brought to the invalid. It was true that he was a little Bohemian in his ways. He did smoke rather strong tobacco, but that was better than using Mr. Chesham's choice cigars. He might with advantage have tried some of our famous and well-advertised English soaps; but, after all, the use of soap could not have made him more agreeable, or more deferential than he already was, and it was not unpleasant to feel one's self superior in one's own immaculate cleanliness, while at the same time taking credit for one's liberal and broad views of life.

To Mrs. Chesham, Barthélemy was like corn in Egypt. He supplied her husband with new subjects of interest, he told him ghastly stories of student life, and, above all, he played chess with him, diverting
from her head the torrents of abuse at her stupidity and carelessness, to which she had been so long exposed without ever getting accustomed to them. And to her he was so respectful, so almost filial with his little airs of affectionate badinage. Decidedly, Barthélemy was an acquisition. She only wished that he and Mabel got on better together.

For Mabel and Victor were at daggers drawn. Mabel found it impossible to forget that it was Barthélemy who had led Hubert astray, as she termed it. She was quite sure that was the only reason for her dislike of him; quite certain that it had nothing to do with his treatment of herself, annoying and wounding to her self-love as that treatment often was.

Barthélemy had a way at times of listening with an appearance of the pro-
foundest interest and respect to anything that fell from Mabel's lips; if any point of possible discussion arose between them, he would withdraw with an elaborate show of humility from so unequal a contest. At other times, on the contrary, he would devote himself in her presence to the recital of all the morbid and realistic horrors imaginable, addressing himself to her as if aware that she was peculiarly interested in such subjects, and remaining apparently utterly impervious to the disgust she took no trouble to hide. Or he would draw her out skilfully and patiently, only to turn round on her with biting and contemptuous sarcasm when she had so far forgotten herself as to become enthusiastic. He had often expressed a wish to be allowed to see some of her work, but she had always flatly
refused. That, at least, should be sacred from his sneering tongue.

She knew that Barthélemy was in correspondence with Hubert, because he made no secret of the fact; indeed, it was one of the ways in which he annoyed her most, for he always turned to her specially when he had any news from Hubert, as if she were the principal person to be interested by it. She resented the impertinence, and tried hard, by never asking a single question, to show her perfect indifference to Hubert's whereabouts and Hubert's doings. And yet, although she despised herself for it, her pulse always quickened at the sound of that once beloved name, and she knew in her heart of hearts that, if she stayed in the drawing-room night after night when Barthélemy was there, it was only that she might not lose a chance of hearing it.
The Antigone had not been far from completion when Mr. Baring had seen it. Mabel worked hard, and finished it about a week later. She had it brought downstairs to be packed ready to send to the Academy, and also, sorely against her will, to exhibit it to Mr. Chesham, who, having been informed by his wife of the praise bestowed upon it by Mr. Baring, expressed a desire to be allowed to judge for himself.

It was put in a good light in the drawing-room, and thither Mr. Chesham repaired to give his opinion.

"Isn't it lovely, darling?" said Mrs. Chesham, fondly, as her portly lord and master stood before it.

Mabel knelt down by the fire, and held out her hands to the blaze. Although she was indifferent to her step-father's
opinion, she did hope he would not say anything very disagreeable about her picture.

Mr. Chesham looked at it long and critically.

"H'm! h'm! And so your friend approves of it?"

"Mr. Baring said it was sure to get in," Mrs. Chesham hastened to say.

"H'm! Are you sure the perspective's quite right, Mabel?"

"Perspective! Who talks of perspective?" said a well-known voice; and, to Mabel's dismay, Monsieur Barthélémy appeared on the scene, running up unannounced, as had become his familiar wont.

She would have flown to cover up her picture, but disdained to let him think she was afraid of him. So, with a flush on her
cheek, she stood up, and tried to look unconcerned.

"Ah!" said Barthélemy, seeing the picture, "what have we here? A work of art?"

"Yes," answered Mr. Chesham, pressing his wife's arm to insure her silence; "it's a picture brought for me to look at. Tell me now, what do you think of it? I should like your candid opinion."

Barthélemy, perfectly unsuspicious, took a good look at the picture.

"What is it?" he asked.

"Antigone defying Creon."

"Ha! a classical subject—something in your line, mademoiselle," said Barthélemy, with a wicked glance at Mabel. "Ye—es, it's not so very bad. Has rather an oleography look about it. Don't you think so, cher ami?"—to Mr. Chesham.
“Dear George” smiled delightedly. Poor little Mrs. Chesham was in agonies. Mabel’s lip curled.

“Tame—decidedly tame. The Antigone’s face is not bad; but Monsieur—Creon, did you say?—looks rather too much like an Italian with an organ. Probably such a person sat for it.”

“Is it worth buying, should you say?” inquired Mr. Chesham, amiably.

“That depends on your own taste, you know. I would not care for it; but, then, I am a heretic. What does Mademoiselle Moore think? It is more in her way than mine—n’est-ce pas, mademoiselle?”

“I can hardly give a fair opinion, as the picture happens to be my own,” said Mabel, coldly.

Barthélemy was really disconcerted. It had never entered his head that the picture
could be Mabel’s. He hastened to say earnestly—

"Mademoiselle, I most sincerely beg your pardon—"

"Oh never mind, Barthélemy," interrupted Mr. Chesham. "A frank and unbiassed opinion is worth a hundred flatteries."

Mabel was pale now, and felt almost inclined to cry. She would have run away, if she had not been ashamed.

"Mr. Baring praised it immensely, and said it was sure to get into the Academy," said Mrs. Chesham in her gentle voice, with a reproachful look at the culprit.

"Mr. Baring? Saint Stephen?" laughed Barthélemy. "Ah yes; he probably took the Antigone for a virgin martyr making her confession of faith."

"When Monsieur Barthélemy and Mr.
Chesham have quite done amusing themselves, mother,” said Mabel in a white heat of anger, “perhaps I may ring for Matthews to help me carry the picture downstairs.”

“Oh, mademoiselle, permit me,” cried Barthélemy, starting forward.

But Mabel said, “No, thank you; I can manage.”

“Come along, Barthélemy; you and I will go and have a smoke downstairs,” said Mr. Chesham, whom this little scene had vastly entertained.

Barthélemy, glad of a chance of escape, followed him down, and Mabel and her mother were left alone.

“My poor Mab! Never mind, darling; Mr. Baring knows better than Monsieur Barthélemy,” said Mrs. Chesham, soothingly.

“What do I care!” answered Mabel.
"You don't suppose that anything that man said could annoy me?"

"It ought not to, but still it was very disagreeable."

"It was very awkward for him!" said Mabel, with a laugh in which some real amusement appeared. "It was too bad of Mr. Chesham."

"It was not wise of George," Mrs. Chesham admitted.

"Not wise? It was very mean. It was just like him."

"Oh, Mabel!"

"Well, never mind, mother; I won't say any more. But, you know, it was just like him. If Monsieur Barthélemy had known that was my picture, he would have been sure to say lots of things even worse than those he did say, only wrapped up in that nasty sneaking politeness of his. My poor
Antigone! And even if she is tame, she is nicer to look at than his ridiculous Wind, which is exactly like a cherub with the toothache. Come along, Antigone; we won't mind what he says. No one ever thought you were perfect, but you shan't stay here to listen to rude and ignorant remarks.”

When Monsieur Barthélemy reached his lodgings that night, his first act was to sit down on the side of his bed, and laugh long and loudly.

“I ought to be ashamed of myself,” he murmured, “but I can't help it. How angry Ma’mselle Démon was! Her classical protest against poor Hubert's magic-lantern slides to be so derided to her face! *Pauvre petite!* How cross Hubert would be with me! Well, I shan’t say anything about it in my next letter.”
CHAPTER X.

A GOOD SUBSTITUTE.

Constance chose to go to bed as soon as she had left the studio on the afternoon of her attempt at escape. She did not feel that she could face either her husband or Mrs. Simes again that day. She did as well as she could without Robson's help, slipped into bed, and lay sobbing until she fell asleep. Her husband came softly into the room once, but finding her sleeping quietly, went away without disturbing her.

The next morning, while Constance was making awkward attempts to put up
her hair, which was long and thick, and baffled all her efforts, her husband, who had been up and hard at work for two or three hours already, came in and uttered a quite friendly "Good morning."

Connie had been prepared to be submissive and humble, but as Stephen's manner implied that he wished to be friendly, she took the opportunity of showing that she could be dignified, and replied in a stiff and indifferent tone.

Baring came over, and sat down by the dressing-table.

"What a lot of hair you have got, Connie!" he remarked. "And what a mess you're making of it!"

"I have never been accustomed to attend to it myself," returned Connie, coldly, without the least shame at her helpless condition.
"No, poor little woman, nor you have. We must see about getting a new maid for you immediately."

Connie looked rather more gracious. So Stephen was coming to his senses at last!

"You could let me have Robson back," she began, but her husband interrupted her.

"No, dear, I really couldn’t. Do you know, Connie, I never could bear that woman. She always seemed to me to be between you and myself. I think she despised me because I am an artist."

"What nonsense, Stephen!"

"Oh, but it isn’t nonsense! That kind of person is so prejudiced. Well, but about a new maid for you. How shall we set about it?"

"I don’t know," said Connie. "My aunt
never changed her maid, and I always had Robson."

"Let me see," said Baring, reflectively, slowly stroking his beard. "Doesn't one advertise in the Times, or something of that sort?"

"Perhaps. There always are lots of advertisements for maids—or perhaps one answers advertisements?"

"N—no; I think it would be best to advertise. Well then, dear, if you will write out an advertisement, I will send it directly, and in a day or two we shall have got what you want."

Constance could hardly understand the sudden change that seemed to have come over her husband. He was gentler than she had ever seen him, and as affectionate as in the first days of their honeymoon. Always impressionable, she began to look
upon Robson’s going away as a sort of good omen, and to wonder whether her faithful old nurse had really—unwittingly, of course—prejudiced her against Stephen, and made them get on badly together.

The thought that it might have been so helped greatly to reconcile her to Robson’s loss, and she even began to feel a pleasurable excitement in the idea of having a new maid.

The advertisement appeared in due course, and Constance had hardly come downstairs on that particular morning when the first maid was announced to be waiting in the hall.

“Oh, Stephen,” cried Connie, darting into the studio, “there’s a maid come! Where shall I see her?”

“Anywhere you like, dear,” said her husband, turning round from his work.
"Oh, dear! I feel quite nervous!"

"My dear child! You don't mean that you are frightened?"

"Well, you know, it is the first time in my life I ever engaged a servant. I shan't know what to say to them, and I'm sure I shall take this one. I shall never have the courage to tell her she won't do, if I don't like her."

"Perhaps," said Baring, going back to his work—"perhaps you would rather see them in here. I am a good judge of faces, and I don't think I shall feel either frightened or nervous."

"Oh, thank you; that will be much more comfortable. Show her in here, Martha."

A stout, middle-aged person was accordingly shown in, whom Baring made very short work of. One would have thought
that he had done nothing but engage lady's-maids all his life.

There were a great many applicants. The address was a good one, and sounded likely to be "comfortable."

Constance grew very weary after she had seen about a dozen women.

"They are all so much alike," she said plaintively, "and they've got such absurdly short characters."

"Wait a little," returned her husband, cheerfully. "Perhaps we shall see someone better soon."

About twelve o'clock came a lull, which Connie hailed with joy.

"Oh, I am so tired, Stephen!" she yawned. "Now, really I shall take the next one that comes, whether I like her or not."

"Impatient child!" answered Baring,
looking at his watch. "One or two of those we have seen were not at all bad. That fair-haired girl, for instance."

"Too young," said Constance, decisively. "I want some one more about Robson's age. It's more convenient."

At this moment Martha ushered in a new arrival, and Constance, with a quite audible groan, raised herself from her lounging position.

The new-comer was a woman of about forty. She was tall, and held herself well. Her features were worn and somewhat haggard, but Constance instantly decided that she must have been very good-looking in her youth. She had dark eyes, sunken in her head, and particularly thick, black eyebrows. She was neatly but well dressed in black, and had an air certainly superior to that of any of the applicants.
whom Connie had as yet seen. She walked up the long studio to where Connie was sitting, passing Mr. Baring at his easel on the way. Her eyes took in the artist's figure and the canvas he was working at with one swift keen glance; then she stopped opposite Constance, and waited for her to speak with perfect self-possession.

"Have you been out as lady's-maid before?" asked Constance, who was beginning to flatter herself that she was quite clever at questioning now.

"Yes, ma'am, all my life, more or less," answered the woman, in an accent the refinement of which struck Constance at once.

The maid was standing so that Mr. Baring could see her face very well. He had stopped painting, and was looking scrutinizingly at her, as he had done at
all the others. After a moment his eye wandered past her to the wall on her right hand, against which hung a number of studies of heads, all more or less finished. He seemed to be looking at one in particular—the head of a girl of about twenty-four or so; a striking face, with large, wistful eyes surmounted by thick, dark eyebrows, a rosy, smiling mouth, and a peculiarly delicate and perfect outline. He was listening attentively to his wife's questions and the maid's answers, while his gaze travelled several times from the girl's head on the wall to the middle-aged woman's face in front of it.

Presently Connie gave him an interrogative look. He made a sideways motion of his head, intended to express qualified approval, at which Connie nodded vehemently back.
"Where did you say you had been last?" she asked.

"With Lady Somers, ma'am. I was there for six years before my mother's health failed, and I left service to go and nurse her. She died a few months ago, and I cannot afford to remain idle any longer."

"Lady Somers will give you a character, I suppose?"

"Oh yes, ma'am; her ladyship promised to recommend me highly. I was very sorry to leave her, for it was the best place I ever had."

"Will you give me Lady Somers's address?"

"Yes, ma'am. Graveleigh Hall, near Norwich. The letter will be forwarded, as her ladyship is travelling—in Russia, I think."
“Oh, but,” said Connie, “I don’t want to wait so long. I am in a great hurry.”

The woman hesitated for a moment.

“Well, ma’am,” she said, “I would much rather you got my character in the ordinary way from Lady Somers, as it’s always so much more satisfactory; but if you really think I should suit you, and you cannot wait, I could get a letter from the clergyman of my mother’s parish, who has known us for years, if you thought that would be sufficient.”

“Oh, quite, I should think,” Connie said eagerly. “What do you say, Stephen? I am in such a hurry, you know.”

The woman turned half round, and looked deferentially at the artist. Baring scanned her from head to foot, and then answered leisurely—

“I almost think that might do. Be-
sides, dear, you know you could write to Lady Somers all the same, though you needn’t wait for her answer."

"Yes, to be sure, so I could. Well, then, if you will get me this letter from your vicar, I will engage you. What is your name?"

"Mary Reid, ma’am."

"Reid. Very well, then."

It was arranged that Reid should enter upon her duties in two days’ time; and, having promised to bring the vicar’s letter as soon as she could get it, Constance’s new maid departed.

"I’m sure she’ll do splendidly!" said Constance, enthusiastically, directly the door had closed upon Mary Reid. "Don’t you like her face and her manner of speaking, Stephen?"

"Ye—es," answered Baring, cautiously,
"I think she looks fairly promising. It's a pity, though, that you can't get her character direct from Lady Somers. I hope it's all right."

"Oh, of course it is! Don't you remember, she didn't want to come before I had heard from Lady Somers. It was I who pressed her."

"True; but still—— Well, we shall see what the parson says."

"I'm sure it'll be all right. Oh, I shall be so glad to have some one to attend to me again. I feel so forlorn when I'm dressing. By the way, Stephen, Mabel's coming up this afternoon. You haven't forgotten that, have you?"

"Miss Moore? To tell the truth," said Baring, looking closely at his work, "I had forgotten it. So she is. Well, you'll be able to tell her that I am not quite such
a brute as you wanted to make out the last time you saw her.”

Constance got red, and fidgeted with her watch-chain. She did so wish she hadn’t gone near Mabel that day.

Mabel appeared in due course, and sat as usual for the artist until tea-time, when Connie acquainted her with her change of maids.

"Robson gone!" said Mabel, surprised. "Oh, poor Robson! Where has she gone to, Connie?"

"I don’t know, Mabel. She said she would never go far away—that she would always stay near me; but she never said where she was going, and I stupidly forgot to ask her."

Mabel smiled. It was so like Connie to have forgotten to ask her.

"But of course she’ll write to me," con-
continued Connie, whose own conscience perhaps reproached her a little; and then, anxious to change the subject—"What do you think, Mabel? Stephen is obliged to go to Paris next week about some engraving business—I don't exactly understand what, and he says I may go too."

"Dear me!" said Mabel. She had been perfectly astounded at the evidently amicable terms on which she had found the artist and his late runaway wife.

"Yes, won't it be lovely? While he is doing his business, I shall go about and shop—he's sure to let me have some money. You can't think how much nicer he is now poor Robson's gone. Of course, when we were in Paris before, it was very dull for me; but, then, that was our honey-moon, so we had to pretend to want to
stay together all the time. But now it’ll be very much jollier.”

“It will be great fun for you,” said Mabel, wishing, as every girl does when she hears of Paris, that she were going too.

“Won’t it? I shall write to you and tell you all about everything, and just what people are wearing.”

“Thank you,” said Mabel, perfectly aware that Connie would never put pen to paper all the time she was away.

Mary Reid brought the letter from her clergyman the following morning. It spoke in very high terms of the bearer, and was eminently satisfactory in every way. Constance was triumphant, and begged off having to write to Lady Somers.

“Surely this letter’s quite enough?” she said. “And it looks so horridly suspicious to want anything more.”
“Just as you like, lazy girl,” responded her husband, with a shrug of the shoulders. “If you are satisfied, I am.”

So Mary Reid was engaged, and came at the time appointed. She acquitted herself from the first evening entirely to her young mistress’s satisfaction, being evidently thoroughly conversant with her duties. Connie was delighted with her, and even caught herself reflecting that, after all, perhaps it was just as well that Robson should have gone. She certainly was a little old-fashioned, and had a habit of treating her rather too much as if she were still a child. And then, it was no use denying that Constance’s relations with her husband had very greatly improved since Robson’s dismissal. Mr. Baring himself was continually ascribing this to Robson’s absence, and really Connie
had almost come to think the same. She would always love Robson, of course, and would never forget how good and faithful she had been; but still, all things considered, she did not regret her departure.

Reid got on admirably with Mrs. Simes, too. That lady had deigned to approve of her, perhaps at a hint from her nephew. There was no lack of bedroom candles now, and no stories of the housekeeper's meanness and miserly ways.

Poor Robson, pining for her darling in her lodgings, little thought how quickly the gap in that darling's shallow heart had been filled up. Perhaps it was better she could not know, or her own faithful heart might have ached even more bitterly than it did already.
CHAPTER XI.

ENTRAPPED.

Mr. and Mrs. Baring, accompanied by the latter's new maid, set out for Paris the following week. Connie took a most affectionate farewell of Mabel, promising to bring her back sundry pairs of gloves, and a full and particular account of all the latest fashions in dress and head-gear.

Her husband's kindness had restored Connie's good looks as if by magic. Her hair, carefully tended by Reid, glittered as of yore; her sapphire eyes danced and shone, her cheeks glowed with health,
and the old smile had returned to the lips that had been so drawn and sad-looking only a few days before. Mabel thought she had never seen her look so pretty as on the afternoon she bade her good-bye. Connie was in her bedroom, pretending to help, but in reality hindering, her maid in her work.

"Now, Reid, don't forget the opera-glass. Mr. Baring has promised to take me to the play this time, and I should be nowhere without an opera-glass."

"I won't forget it, ma'am," said Reid, who never lost her patience, or altered her quiet, pleasant manner.

"That's right. And oh! mind you pack my large white fan!"

"Yes, ma'am."

"Mabel, which would you take—this bonnet, or this one?" asked Connie,
balancing the two articles in question on her two pretty little fists.

"Put them on, and let me see."

Connie put one on, and turned herself round and round, with the gravest of faces.

"Now the other. Oh, I should take the white one; it is much the more becoming."

"I wonder where Hubert is?" said Connie, reflectively, when she had handed over the white bonnet to Reid.

"He is in Barcelona," said Mabel, slightly flushing.

"How do you know?" exclaimed Connie, opening her eyes very widely. "Does he write to you? He never does to me."

"No; of course not. I heard Monsieur Barthélemy say so to papa the other day."

"H'm! I half hoped he might be in
Paris, and that we might come across him there. But if he's in—where did you say?—"

"Barcelona."

"—Barcelona, there's not much chance, I'm afraid."

"I should hardly think so."

"Do you often see Monsieur Barthélemy, Mab?"

"Yes; much more often than I like," answered Mabel, frowning. "He's continually coming to see Mr. Chesham."

"Perhaps he's in love with you," suggested Constance.

"That he certainly is not. You've no idea how disagreeable he is to me. I believe he dislikes me very much."

"Well, don't go and marry a Frenchman, dear. It would be so horrid."

"At all events, I can promise you that I
will not marry that particular Frenchman," said Mabel, with a laugh.

The artist and his wife reached Paris safely, and put up at the Grand Hotel. Constance found her maid even more valuable than she had expected. Not only was she perfectly familiar with Paris, knowing exactly to which shops to go, but, to Connie's delight, Reid could speak French very fairly well, even better than Connie, who had had a Parisian governess for years. Mr. Baring was able to transact his business, leaving his wife in perfect safety and contentment in her maid's charge. He gave Connie a moderate sum of money, which he begged her not to spend foolishly; and Constance was so well pleased with her husband just then, that she really faithfully attempted to obey this injunction.
The days slipped quickly by. Mr. Baring devoted his afternoons and evenings to his wife; drove her in the Bois; took her to dine at the best restaurants, and to all the theatres she wanted to go to.

Constance enjoyed herself hugely, and regretted Robson less and less every day. Of course she forgot her promise of writing to Mabel, but she bought her friend several pretty and exceedingly useless nick-nacks, which she thought would do quite as well as a letter, and which were no trouble to get.

The day of return came all too soon; she would have liked to stay in Paris for ever. The idea of Mrs. Simes and her eternal sermons on household economy made her shudder. She had, however, elaborated a plan in her little golden head,
which she meant to carry into effect as soon as possible. This was, to profit by Stephen's new-born kindness and generosity to persuade him to let Mrs. Simes carry herself and her virtues elsewhere, and to allow Reid to have the housekeeping in her charge. She thought it not unlikely that her husband would yield to judicious and well-timed pressure. He must see how very clever Reid was, although, for some reason or other, he seemed never to have been able to take to her, and was always finding fault with everything she did. Once Connie had gone abruptly into the dressing-room, which opened out of her bedroom at the hotel, and had found her husband standing in the middle of the room, with Reid close to him. Just as she came in, Reid said—

"I think the button's all right now,
sir;” and Mr. Baring had said testily, after the maid had gone away with her usual noiseless step—

“That woman of yours is the most useless creature I ever met with, Connie. I asked her to sew a button on my shirt-cuff, and you should just have seen the mess she made of it. If she attends to you in the same manner, I wonder you can stand her!"

Poor Stephen! He was so very impatient.

Reid had packed everything; the hotel bill was paid; Connie had her bonnet on, and was only waiting for Stephen, when he came hurriedly into the bedroom, and said, with a very vexed expression—

“The most tiresome thing! Here, where's your luggage?"

“It's all gone downstairs, Stephen, and
we ought to start at once, if we want to catch our train. What's so tiresome?"

"Why, I just ran across that stupid Beaumont—you know the man I mean. He's come over with Gordon, and it seems they have made up a party to dine at the Café Anglais to-night, and counted on me, knowing I was here. I don't exactly see how to get out of it, for several reasons. Was there ever anything so provoking!"

"But what are we to do?"

"I think you'd better get up your things again, and stay here until to-morrow morning. It won't make much difference, and we can telegraph home."

"All right," said Connie. "Reid, just run down and tell them to bring up our luggage again."

Reid departed, but returned in a few minutes with a very long face.
"If you please, ma’am, they’ve sent your things with the other luggage to the station already, in the cart that takes every one’s luggage."

"How stupid!" said Connie, crossly. "What are we to do now, Stephen? Send after it?"

Baring reflected for a moment. Then he said—

"Look here, dear; the best thing you can do is just to go home with Reid. It’s not worth the trouble of bringing the things back here, and unpacking them all again. You will get home comfortably to-night, and I shall be with you to-morrow."

Connie looked doleful, but the plan nevertheless recommended itself to her. She was always unwell at sea, and hated to travel in a smoking carriage. By going
with Reid she would avoid the latter, and could make herself comfortable on the boat without feeling that she was deserting her husband. She therefore allowed herself to be persuaded; and Mr. Baring gave Reid the necessary funds, and a great many injunctions which she was to be sure to observe.

"Good-bye till to-morrow, Stephen," then said Connie, holding up her pretty face to be kissed.

"Good-bye, Constance."

"Have you caught cold, dear? Your voice sounds so husky."

"No, not in the least, thanks," Mr. Baring answered, with a little nervous laugh.

"Sure?"

"Quite sure."

"Well, good-bye—au revoir. Take care of yourself."
She was gone.

"Good-bye," muttered Baring, as he watched the carriage drive off on its way to the station. "Good-bye, Constance."

The journey seemed long and tedious to Connie. She had not the gift of observation, which is sufficient in itself to keep its possessor amused and interested. If there was nobody to talk to her, she felt bored and lonely, as she did now. She tried to get up a conversation with Reid, but her maid said she had a toothache, and only answered in monosyllables until Connie gave it up in despair. She sat staring out of the window, looking at the swiftly passing landscape with unseeing eyes. She was very sorry indeed to leave Paris, where she had been so happy and so free. She wondered if Stephen would go on
being kind and nice to her, or whether he would relapse into the old absorbed, silent ways. Would he, as he had promised, let her have an allowance, and did he really intend to furnish the drawing-room? He had said something, too, about her going out more during the approaching season. If he only would not draw back, how she could enjoy herself! And if he would send away Mrs. Simes, and let Reid rule in her place, how comfortable that would be!

With thoughts such as these, Connie occupied herself until the train reached Calais; and, after a hurried meal at the station restaurant, they went on board the boat. There were not nearly so many people crossing this way as there had been from Dover to Calais a few days before, but still Reid objected, when her mistress proposed going down to the ladies' cabin,
that it would be crowded and uncomfortable.

"Far better to stay up on deck, ma'am," she said. "You'll run less chance of feeling ill, and it's such a lovely, warm evening."

Connie yielded, and her maid tucked her up in rugs and shawls in a sheltered corner, where she was secure from observation and from the gentle breeze which was stirring.

Reid herself sat down at a little distance, near enough to mount guard over her mistress, but far enough off to make it impossible for Connie to talk to her, which no doubt she dreaded on account of her aching jaws.

They reached Dover in due course. The light was fast fading, and in another hour's time it was practically dark. Connie was
tired, and dozed most of the way, waking up at Herne Hill, and asking rather fretfully if it were not London "at last."

Mary Reid's tooth appeared to be giving her a good deal of pain. She moved about restlessly, kept frowning and wiping her face with her handkerchief. She was a very self-controlled person, however, and had not lived to her time of life without knowing that a lady's-maid has no license for aches of any sort; so she kept her agony to herself, and was as alert as ever when they at length reached the terminus. She got Connie into a four-wheeled cab, and the portmanteaux through the custom-house in her own capable manner, and after telling the cabman where to go, she got in herself, and sat down opposite her mistress.

Connie was still drowsy, and after the first minute or two, during which she
looked out of the window, to make comparisons between the streets of Paris and of London—unfavourable, of course, to the latter—she leaned back in her corner and closed her eyes.

It was quite dark now in the more quiet streets. Every now and then they passed either a street lamp with double jets, or a public-house brilliantly lighted up. When the light fell upon Connie's face, Reid always bent forward a little, and looked anxiously at her. Connie never opened her eyes. The drive was a somewhat long one, but the cab at last came to a standstill.

"Are we home?" said Connie, roused by the stoppage, and sitting up.

Reid cleared her throat.

"If you please, ma'am," she said, "Mr. Baring gave me a note which I was to
leave here on our way home. It's about a model who's to come to-morrow, I believe."

"How tiresome!" Connie said fretfully. "As if he couldn't have sent it by post. Well, jump out and leave it."

Reid got out of the cab, and rang the bell of the house before which they had stopped. It was a small house, standing by itself in a garden. A girl opened the door after an interval, and held a short colloquy with Reid. Connie leaned back again, and shut her eyes. She thought it exceedingly inconsiderate of Stephen to have delayed her like this.

Reid came down the pathway after having delivered her note, and spoke to the cabman, who climbed down from his box, and got the portmanteaux from the roof of his vehicle. Connie opened her
eyes at the noise, and when she saw what was going on, called to her maid—

"What are you doing, Reid?"

Reid came up to the window of the cab, put her head inside, and said, almost in a whisper—

"Hush, ma'am; don't take any notice. The man's as drunk as he can be. I was afraid of it from the first. We had better change cabs. If you'll get out here, we'll send for one; only don't speak to the man, because he's certain to be impudent."

"How horrid!" said Connie. "Quick! Let me get out."

She descended with alacrity, and stood on the pavement.

"Shall I take them bags inside, mum?" asked the man in the hoarse, gruff tone common to cabmen in general, and to drivers of four-wheelers in particular.
"No, thank you," said Reid, seizing the two portmanteaux and depositing them just inside the garden gate. "Pretend to go inside," she whispered to Connie, who accordingly went up the narrow path.

The man got on his box, pulled his waterproof cape straight, growled out something which might be intended for a "Good night," whipped up his horse, and departed.

"How are we to get a cab here, in this lonely road?" asked Connie.

"We've not come out of our way, ma'am," Reid said cheerfully. "There's a rank just at the end of this road; I'll run and get a cab in a minute. Only," she added, bethinking herself, "you mustn't stay out here by yourself. Suppose you just go inside for a moment. It looks nice and clean."
The girl who had opened the door, and who had been holding it all this time, while she stared out at what was passing, said directly—

"Yes, pray come inside, madam."

Connie, nothing loath, entered the hall, lighted by a candle which the girl had apparently brought downstairs with her. She sat down on a cane chair which, with a narrow mahogany table, formed the only furniture of the passage.

Reid carried the luggage inside, and set it down.

"That's right. You can shut the door now, Jessie," she said coolly.

Jessie closed the door, turned the key, and shot the bolts.

"What does this mean?" said Connie. "I thought you were going for a cab, Reid?"
“Not just now, my dear,” returned Reid. She had, as by magic, thrown off her maid’s respectful, demure manner. Her very features seemed to have changed. It was a pale, determined woman who stood before Connie now.

Connie, with her blue eyes opened to their widest extent, and their pupils dilated with alarm, raised both her hands, and her lips had parted to give vent to a scream, when she found one of her maid’s hands pressed tightly over them. At the same time the candle was blown out, and they were left in utter darkness.

No one spoke for a few moments. Connie’s heart beat as if it would suffocate her. She strained her lips against the restraining hand at her mouth—such a hard, strong hand it felt. She heard the breathing of the two women beside her,
and fancied that Reid was moving her other hand towards her. Was she going to murder her? If only she could see! Anything, even the sight of a knife, would be better than this awful, cruel darkness.

It was only a minute or two, but to Connie it seemed ages. When Reid spoke she started violently.

"Will you promise not to scream or call out if I let you go? Nod your head if you will. If you should break your promise it will be the worse for you."

Connie made a motion of her head, and the hand was at once taken away. She drew a long breath.

"Now listen," went on the maid in the same cold, clear tone. "I have brought you here for your own good. I don't mean to do you any harm; on the contrary, I want to save you. But I don't
intend to get myself into trouble, and if
you don’t keep quiet and do as I tell you,
I shall get into trouble. So now, will you
be quiet, and let me do as I think right?"

“I—I—can’t understand what it all
means,” faltered Connie. She was terribly
frightened. The obscurity, the silent girl
on one side of her, and this new, altered
Reid on the other, were all so fearful. If
only they would light the candle again!
But Reid had not studied Constance for
nothing; she knew very well what she
was about.

“Of course you can’t; but you shall
presently.”

“Mr. Baring will be very angry with
you,” said poor Connie, with one last
attempt at dignity.

Reid laughed scornfully.

“Yes, I dare say he would, but not for
the reason you think. He won’t know anything about it, though. Now, you just listen to me, and I’ll tell you what this precious husband of yours has tried to do. He wants to get rid of you for some reason or other—what, I don’t know. That was why he sent away your old maid. His plan is to get you put away in one of those awful lunatic asylums, where they take any one whose friends can pay and ask no questions. You must have read about them, ma’am, I’m sure. Places where they beat you, and starve you, and almost kill you by ill treatment.”

Connie shuddered; her teeth were beginning to chatter. Reid gave a grim smile under cover of the darkness.

“Once in a place like that, and there’s no hope for you. You might as well be
dead already, for there's no one to listen and no one to help. If you say you're not mad, that's taken as a certain proof of your madness. There's no help—no hope."

The woman paused for an instant, during which her last words burned themselves indelibly into Connie’s brain—

"No help—no hope!"

"Well," Reid continued, "Mr. Baring has been trying to persuade me, ever since I came to you, that you were really mad. He hinted at it the very first day. He thinks me more of a fool than I am, though, and I've done my best to make him think so. I pretended to believe him, although of course I know you're not a bit mad; and I let him talk and talk, until at last he thought he could get me to do as he wished. He bribed me heavily to take you over, and put you in an asylum not far
from London, where they would keep you safe enough.”

To Connie, absolutely ignorant of lunacy laws and doctor’s certificates, this all seemed perfectly feasible and likely. She made no movement, and Reid went on—

“I took his money, because he would have suspected me if I’d refused it; and, besides, I shall have to keep you. I shall tell him to-morrow that I got you in all right, and he’ll never suspect anything. I was to put you in as a relative of my own, and he’s to send me the money for your keep at the asylum; so that, as he’ll have no dealings with them himself, he’ll never be able to find out, so long as we keep mum.”

“But—what is to become of me?” said Connie, low and huskily.

“You must stay here with me and my
sister Jessie. It'll be a bit dull, no doubt, but we'll do all we can for you, and, anyhow, it's better than the madhouse. Still, of course, ma'am, if you should prefer to go there, you can do as you please. I've told you all about it now, and my hands are clean of the business."

"No—oh no!" said Connie, with a shiver. "I—I am very grateful to you. It's very good of you. Only—don't you think you could find Robson, and bring her to me?"

"Well, we can see to-morrow," said Reid; and no one could have told from her voice that she was again smiling ironically. "We can talk to-morrow about what's to be done. But for to-night, at all events, you must stop quietly here. And now, Jessie, light that candle."

The light flickered up again, and Reid,
with a sharp glance at Constance's deathly white cheeks and tremulous lips, threw open the door just behind her, and invited her to enter.

It was a small but neatly and not untastefully furnished room. The table was laid for one, and Constance presently found herself, all dazed and bewildered as she was, eating cold chicken and drinking wine, under Reid's directions. She felt unaccountably heavy and drowsy when she had finished; her thoughts seemed to be deadened, and she only wanted to lay her head down and go to sleep. Reid, who never took her eyes off her, apparently perceived this, for she lost no time in helping her upstairs into a bedroom as neat and clean as the sitting-room below. Here she put her to bed, waiting on her as deftly and assiduously as was her
custom. Constance's head had no sooner touched the pillow than she was asleep. Reid made herself quite sure of this fact before she left her. When she did so, she turned the key in the lock outside, and put it in her pocket.

She then descended the stairs and went into the sitting-room, where Jessie was just finishing laying the table afresh.

Miss Reid sank into a chair with a groan.

"That's a good thing over!" she said. "Drat the girl! I was afraid she'd give a lot more trouble; but, as it is, it was difficult enough. However, I don't think there's much fear of her waking for the next twelve hours or so. I gave her a good dose."

"How young she is!" said Jessie, in a low tone.
"Young enough, little wretch—yes, she's young enough," returned her sister, gloomily.

"And pretty, too," ventured Jessie, half timidly.

"That's as opinions go. Stephen's taste must have altered. Look how fair she is. But she had money—plenty of it. That's where her charm came in."

"What are you going to do with her?"

"Keep her here, of course. That's what he pays me to do; and I've made him pay pretty heavily, too, I can tell you, Jess. I dare say he'd have liked me to murder her, but I wouldn't do that. No. I may be bad, but I draw the line at that. I hate the creature enough, too—little simpering fool that she is—but I wouldn't kill her."

"Why does he want to get rid of her?"
asked Jessie, presently, when Mary had seated herself at the table, and had taken up her knife and fork.

"He didn’t tell me, nor I didn’t ask him," returned her sister, with a harsh laugh. "I suppose he wants to be up to some more of his little games. But that’s nothing to do with me, nor with you either. He’s an old friend of mine, and he pays well; so I’m glad to do him a service, so long as he don’t want anything out of the way."

"Will the lady keep quiet, do you think?"

"She’d better," said Miss Reid, with an ominous tightening of her lips. "I’m ready to be kind, but I won’t stand no nonsense. Any one else might have managed this little business a different way—might have bullied her and cowed
her. That's not my idea. She shall have good value for her husband's money, and as comfortable a time as she likes of it, as long as she chooses to see things the way I want her to. If not—"

"Perhaps she'll try to run away," suggested Jessie.

Mary turned upon her fiercely.

"You'd better not let her. She's in your charge, remember, and if you play me any tricks, or let her slip through your fingers, out you go. If the neighbours should catch sight of her, and get inquisitive, you know what you've to say. That she's a relation of our own, who's not quite right in the head—lost her senses from domestic trouble. But she must be kept out of the way, mind. She's easy enough to manage, for she's an awful little fool. You only need to be firm, and to
keep on frightening her about the asylum, and you'll find she won't give you much trouble. She'll make up her mind to things presently, and then we shall get on straight enough. Now then, good night; I'm off to bed. If she should wake in the morning before me and call, you fetch me. I've got the key of her door in my pocket, and her clothes are in my room."
CHAPTER XII.

A DISAPPOINTMENT.

Mabel's room was full of bright, tender April sunshine. The sun was everywhere — on the untidy table, with its bowl full of delicate spring blossoms, and its litter of books, work, and sketches; on Mabel's canary, which was pouring forth its little soul in shrill and joyous song as it swung to and fro on the perch at the top of its cage; on the easel and on the clean white canvas standing on it; and lastly on Mabel herself, as she sat in her favourite old chair. Mabel was very fond of sunshine;
she preferred her tablecloth and carpet to lose all their colour to the alternative of pulling down her blind, and remaining in undestructive but depressing gloom. This April sun was just right, too—not too hot, nor crudely glaring, but delightful in its suave, kindly radiance, which seemed to invite one to bask in it, and remember that spring had come again.

Mabel had been very unhappy that long winter. She had become so familiar with the longing and aching pain at her heart that she had almost ceased to hope for its removal; but as she sat in her studio this bright, glorious spring morning, she felt that there are degrees of suffering, and light as well as shadow.

It was a great thing to have sent in a picture to the Academy at last, and a picture that had been so highly spoken of
by an Academician. Mabel entertained no doubt of its acceptance after what Mr. Baring had said. An eye so skilled and so accustomed to judge could have made no mistake. She had been expecting the Academy letter for the last few days, waiting in pleasurable hope that was almost certainty.

She was taking a holiday to-day. It was really too fine to work. She had loitered aimlessly about the house, drawing up the blinds and letting in the sunshine everywhere, arranging and rearranging flowers, watering plants; in the end she had come up here, meaning to paint; but as soon as she had opened the door, her good resolutions had fled, and she had remained as lazy as she had been downstairs.

She was sure, quite sure; still she did
wish the letter would come. It would be such a triumph over that horrid, sneering Barthélemy, who asked her every time he came, which was very much too often, if she had had news of her picture yet.

What a disagreeable man Barthélemy was! She was obliged to own to herself that he was wonderfully amusing occasionally, but he was frivolous and unsatisfactory, not occasionally, but always. Of course he could not be in the least worthy of any one’s respect, else “dear George” would not have taken such a fancy to him. Hubert had been taken in by his brilliance, fascinated by his powers of conversation, and doubtless by his flattery, but he could surely never have had any real feeling of affection for him.

Poor Hubert! She wondered if he ever regretted what he had done. Was he
sorry to have thrown aside the substance for the shadow? Would he forsake his new and dangerous path, and return to the old true way? Would he——

Her reflections were broken in upon at this point by the entrance of the parlour-maid with a letter for her.

Mabel sprang upon it. Was it—yes, it was. At last!

The sun poured in as warmly and cheerily as ever, the canary sang as loudly as before, but Mabel sat with her face hidden in her hands, leaning upon the table, the letter lying before her as she had cast it down after that first hurried glance.

Refused! Her picture was refused! Down clattered her castle in Spain, which had already reached an almost giddy height, and buried in its ruins sat Mabel.
The disappointment was all the more severe because she had been so certain, so complacently sure. She had not expected her picture to be hung well; she was ready to have it skyed, but not refused. How had it come about? Could there be any mistake? She seized the official-looking document, and read it over again; then let it fall, and sadly shook her head. No, there was no mistake. Her picture was not accepted.

Her assurance of an hour ago seemed absurd, presumptuous to her now. She mocked herself, calling herself uncomplimentary names—conceited, arrogant, vain; she must have been all that to have made so sure. But Mr. Baring's judgment? It was he who had first made her look forward to success. Why had he praised her picture so if it were worthless? For,
with her usual impetuosity, Mabel at once leaped from one extreme to the other. If the picture was not good enough for the Academy, it was without merit of any sort. Or was it true, as she had so often heard, that the Academicians were really not impartial judges, that very often a new name had no chance with them, that they reserved the Exhibition walls for their own pictures and those of their favourites?

She wished that Mr. Baring were at home, so that she might go to him and ask him about it. She would trust his word, and no one else's. She could have trusted Hubert's word too, but Hubert was far away. He had chosen to desert her. Now, just at the very outset of both their careers, when each might have so helped and sustained the other, they were apart.
Disappointments like these shared would lose half their bitterness.

Hubert had had to bear the same blow under which she was suffering now, more than once. For three or four years in succession his pictures had been refused. How well she remembered his dejection and discouragement! She had always sympathized with and felt sorry for him, but, at the same time, she had thought that he took his rejection rather too much to heart. Another twelve months to wait had seemed so short, when she had looked at them from a not disinterested, but still not absolutely personal, point of view. Only twelve months, and then he could try again! Her memory had always been full of names to quote to him—names of painters who had gone on year after year, persevering bravely and undauntedly, until
at last their courage had been crowned by success. Hubert's sad smile and weary eyes rose before her, as he would nod in acquiescent response to each cited example. It had been easy enough to be brave and hopeful for him; but now that the same trouble had come to her, she found that in spite of her wisdom, notwithstanding her boasted philosophy, an arrow shot straight into one's heart makes that heart bleed and smart beyond the power of human sympathy to heal.

It is part of the grim irony of Fate that our worst wounds are those which we must bear alone. No friend, however dear, no soul, however akin to our own, can do more than cross with us the shallow brooks and streams of life. The deep and fast-flowing river, the whirlpool in which we lose our footing, the fathomless waters
which almost close over our heads—all these, like the valley of the shadow of death, we must go through alone. Though our friend be near us, with heart and hand at our service, it avails but very little. We cannot, even if we would, lay bare the history of the long hours of perplexity, and struggle with ourselves, through which we have passed. If we tried to tell our friend, whence should we borrow language which would adequately describe what we longed to express? "I have suffered," is all that a heart that has been truly wrung can say. Our friend must understand, and be ready with the salve of sympathy to try to cool and heal our hurt; he must comprehend without being told, guess most where we can describe least.

The circumstances of Mabel's life were
responsible for the fault which was most apparent in her nature. She had, from her childhood, been obliged to be so self-reliant, so self-sufficient, to cultivate the valuable quality of common sense to so great a degree, that it had slightly, superficially, frozen over that blessed gift of sympathy, which is perhaps the most precious with which a human being can be endowed. Strong herself, resolutely turning the humorous side of things uppermost, she occasionally ran the risk of seeming a little hard where other people were concerned. Seeming only, for in reality her heart was infinitely tender and pitiful. But it is of no use to have a soft heart if one does not give others the benefit of it; and Mabel had, in her dread of descending to sentimentality, forgotten that sentiment, and plenty of it, is a very
good thing in its own way and in its proper place.

The young, in the flush of strength, serene in the inexperienced which they take for courage, sometimes deliver hard and severe judgments which, in the mellowed knowledge of later years, they would give worlds to recall, when, alas! it is too late. Which of us has not some precipitate decision, some harsh and discouraging dictum, some humorously rallying speech to deplore, which, at the time, we complacently thought showed our own sagacity and superior good sense, but which, in the years to come, will often recur to us, presented in its true colours of obtuseness and want of sympathy? What an array of blunders and errors will one day arise and accuse us! There can be no turning away, no shutting one's eyes, no
use in saying, "I meant it for the best." The consequences of such mistakes will stare us piteously in the face; there is no escaping them. Happy he among us who has erred on the side of self-distrust and leniency. His weakness will at least have recoiled on himself alone; he will have to reproach himself with no cruel thrusts at tender and well-beloved, lonely and yearning breasts—ill-considered, thoughtless thrusts, which he would give his heart's best blood to take back, but which have long since vanished into the silent and irrevocable past.

Mabel—large-hearted, generous, high-spirited Mabel—had already created for herself a goodly company of these vindictive spectres. She was hard sometimes, in the exuberance of her health and strength, and she would be hard until her own
A DISAPPOINTMENT.

suffering had taught her the necessities of others. Already, as she sat bewailing her disappointment, she had given a softer and more kindly thought to Hubert than she had for many a long day. She had thrust Hubert out of her heart with one fierce push, because she had chosen to consider him untrue to himself, as if it is not just when we are inclined to be untrue to ourselves that we stand most in need of a friend's firm and loving hand. Perfection needs no sympathy, no support; it can tread its sublime heights without communion with other and less favoured minds. It is the weak and uncertain soul which craves to feel that, unworthy, vacillating though it may be, there is one spirit at least on which it can lean for a while, from which it can gain renewed strength and courage to pursue its upward path.
Even now, she dimly realized that she had been a little severe, a little hasty. That missive from Burlington House had made the first rent in the veil which had hitherto obscured her vision, and from which, when fully torn aside, would shine out her real, true, womanly heart in all its gracious perfectness.

She cried a little presently. Not only on account of her picture, but because she felt that, somehow or other, she had missed her life. She had not arrived at that complete consciousness of her mistake that would, sooner or later, come to her, but she did begin to understand that she had made a mistake. An irretrievable one, it appeared to her; for although a girl may send a man away, the unwritten laws of maidenhood prevent her calling him back. Hubert was gone, and she was alone for ever.
CHAPTER XIII.

BEREAVED.

Mr. Baring was at home again. After his wife's sad and terribly sudden death from cholera in Paris, he had felt himself unable to face the London world again for some time, and had betaken himself to Italy, where he had travelled for two months before coming back to his work. He had let the Academy opening and the Academy banquet pass by without him; he had had none of the critiques on his own pictures sent to him; in fact, he had
banished himself as completely as an inconsolable husband should. Mrs. Simes had enjoyed a glorious opportunity, of which she had availed herself to the very utmost extent, of turning the artist's house inside out for a "spring cleaning"—a function in which her very soul delighted, but which, owing to Baring's presence, she had never been able to indulge in properly before.

This time, however, she determined that the thing should be thoroughly well done. She began by dismantling poor Connie's room. Mrs. Simes had been a good deal startled by the very unexpected news of her nephew's loss, but she could not say she was sorry. She had found out, in the very early days of Baring's marriage, that her first conception of Constance was an altogether erroneous one. She had
always felt a sort of grudge against the girl for not turning out what she herself had chosen to consider her, and Constance's behaviour had certainly never contributed to soften this unkind feeling.

She had disliked and despised Mrs. Simes; she had sneered at her economy, thwarted, as far as she could, her intentions and arrangements, and had never concealed that she considered the old lady and all her doings infinitely beneath herself. Only the recollection of her fortune had made Constance bearable to Mrs. Simes, and now that Constance was gone, while the fortune remained, she felt nothing but a sense of triumph. She carefully obliterated every trace of her nephew's young wife, exiling all Connie's pretty things to her own bedroom, and never resting until she had restored to
the other rooms their pristine bare and inhospitable look.

As she trottled backwards and forwards, duster in hand, she sometimes wondered a little whether Stephen himself were sorry. She had never been able to fathom his heart with respect to his feeling for his wife. Had he loved her or had he not? It seemed to her that he had always been exceedingly kind to Connie—Mrs. Simes's conception of kindness being a purely negative one—but had he been fond of her? Would he miss her? Well, it was no use wondering. Whatever Stephen had thought of his wife, he would never tell his aunt anything about it. What she could see for herself she was welcome to know, but beyond that she need not hope for information.

So the worthy lady dismissed the subject
from her mind, together with the cook—now an unnecessary luxury—and contented herself with polishing furniture and scolding the hapless Martha from sunny morn till dewy eve.

She sighed to think of the accumulations of dust and dirt there must be in the studio; her fingers tingled to besiege it with duster and broom, but Baring's orders were peremptory on the point. The furnace that heated the hot-water pipes in the room might be lighted, if she liked, so as to keep off all damp; but this was all. He himself must be present before anything further were done; so, tempting as was the thought of the dust, she kept away from it.

The house was resplendent with mottled soap and soda, and as uncomfortably prim as only Mrs. Simes could make it, when
the day which Mr. Baring had appointed for his return arrived.

Mrs. Simes had so far made a concession to the laws of etiquette as to provide herself with a new black gown, sensibly and conveniently short in the skirts. She had always regarded Connie's trailing train with lofty contempt, and, indeed, it would have been rather out of place in Mrs. Simes's well-beloved regions below.

She meant to be decorously sympathetic, but, do what she would, there was an unmistakable gleam of triumph in her hard old eye as she stood in the hall to watch for her nephew.

Mr. Baring himself, however, never even glanced at her as he greeted her. He was exactly the same as ever; no graver—that would have been difficult—no sadder-looking than before. If people expected to see
any change in him they were mistaken. Stephen Baring was not the man to wear his heart on his sleeve.

He fell into the old routine directly. Once more Mrs. Simes ruled supreme. No meal was too frugal, too scanty, nor too ill served; no makeshift too sordid. Her nephew accepted everything as before, only leaving his studio for food, and vouchsafing very few words, either good or bad, while he was eating it.

For the first few months he hardly ever went out of the house. He seemed to be working very hard, and although Mrs. Simes watched him closely, she could not discern that he was grieving, or that he felt lonely.

When six months had gone by, Mr. Baring felt that the duty he owed to conventionality had been paid. A widower
of six months' standing may be allowed to make a morning call or two upon his late wife's most intimate friends. Who so capable of sympathizing with his loss, who so kindly lenient to his absorbing grief, who so patient and consolatory, as those who could comprehend to the full how great that loss was?

When Mabel came down the first time to see the artist, she felt that she had no words in which to express her sorrow.

Constance's death had been an exceedingly great shock to her. Her friend had been so bright, so specially full of life, the last time she had seen her. Trouble and pain had seemed so far off; the small clouds which had swept across her horizon had disappeared, leaving her all the more hopeful and serene. Nothing but joy had been in store for her; and now—she was dead!
Connie and death! The two ideas were so dissimilar, it seemed impossible they should ever come together. We see a gaily coloured butterfly disporting itself in the brilliant sunlight, darting here, there, everywhere, gladdening our hearts by its beauty and grace; to-morrow that butterfly will be lying dead, where it has fallen after its race is run; but who ever associates death with a butterfly? It is the very emblem of gladsome, joyous life, and so had Connie seemed to Mabel.

So pretty, so winsome, so light of heart! That she had been light of brain also appeared, in the reflection of that merciful mirror which death holds up, but an insignificant matter. Mabel could not console herself with the remembrance of what Connie had not been; she mourned her for what she had been.
She recalled, with bitter self-reproach, the last time but one that she had seen her friend—Hubert's sister.

How cold, how quick to judge she had been when poor Connie had flown to her for help! She did not doubt even now, for her faith in Mr. Baring was still steady and deep-rooted, that Constance had been in the wrong; but—she might have been more gentle, more kind. Yes, Robson had told her that some day she would be less hard. That day had been swift to come. With all her soul she regretted that she had withheld her sympathy from Connie that morning—the last time, if she had only known it, that she would have the opportunity of sympathizing with her.

It was with a heart full of self-rebuke that she approached Mr. Baring, her poor Connie's bereaved husband. Her eyes
filled with irrepressible tears as she shook hands with him; her look and her firm hand-clasp told him what she could not say.

Mrs. Chesham was already in the room, and was wiping her eyes as Mabel came in. She, too, had been dreadfully upset by the sad news, for she had been really fond of Constance in her tender, motherly way.

Mr. Baring broke a somewhat embarrassing silence by asking Mabel—

"And what is the news of your picture? Is it sold yet? I have not been to the Academy, so I am absolutely ignorant of everything."

Mabel flushed.

"My picture is upstairs," she said, with an attempt at a smile. "It was refused."

"Refused?" repeated Mr. Baring, really surprised.
"Yes."

"Well," said the artist, "I cannot understand that. What incomprehensible people they are! It was so thoroughly good when I saw it."

Mabel gave no answer.

"Would you let me look at it again?" asked Baring, in the voice that seemed to have become fuller and deeper than ever, turning to look at her as he spoke.

"Certainly, if you don't mind the trouble."

"Trouble!" said Baring, in an undertone, which nevertheless reached Mabel's ears.

The picture was brought down, and placed in the same position in which it had been when Monsieur Barthélemy made his unwelcome and ominous remarks.
Baring looked at it attentively. Then he slightly shook his head.

"You didn't finish it carefully enough," he said gravely; "it is not as good as when I saw it before."

"I am afraid it is very bad," said Mabel, despondently.

"N—no, not very bad; but you have spoilt it. A pity, for it promised so well, so very well. Never mind; you must just begin again."

He gave a pleasant little laugh and a very kind smile as he spoke, but Mabel answered—

"I am afraid I've made a mistake in thinking I could ever come to anything. You were right, Mr. Baring, when you told me that women's work was no good."

"Can I ever have said that?" said Baring, raising his eyebrows. Then
glancing round to make sure that Mrs. Chesham was far enough off, he murmured, 
“You see, I didn’t know you then. Other women are so different.”

Mabel looked a little displeased, but her brow cleared instantly as the artist finished: 
“That’s what my poor Connie always said of you.”

“Dearest Connie!” said Mabel; and, looking at Mr. Baring with her eyes again filling with tears, she continued, “Mr. Baring, I want to ask you a very great, great favour.”

“Yes?” said Baring, interrogatively.

“It is so great a favour that I hardly have the courage to ask it.”

“Anything I can do for my wife’s greatest friend shall be done.”

“I want——” said Mabel, hesitating. “I have no good photograph of Connie. She
took so badly, you know. All her prettiness was lost in a photograph. I want you—oh, I should be so grateful if you would—just to make me a little—quite a slight one—sketch of her head. You have a portrait you could do it from, I know."

Mr. Baring did not answer for a moment, during which Mabel had quite sufficient leisure to grow ashamed of herself for proffering so bold a request. Then he said slowly—

"Certainly. I will make you a sketch, with much pleasure."

The day following his visit, Mr. Baring set about fulfilling his promise.

He dragged out from behind a number of canvases, where it lay hidden, the first portrait he had made of his wife, long ago.
He put it on an easel, and sat down in front of it.

Had she really been as pretty as that? Had she such very deep blue eyes, and such a tender, appealing little smile? Surely her eyes had never worn so wistful, so pleading a look? He had absolutely made her seem as if she had been thinking of something, whereas, as he very well knew, she never thought of anything at all. It was a good piece of work, though, very good—all the better for being so much idealized as it undoubtedly was.

He gazed at it coolly and unflinchingly. It was so long since she had been—dead, that he had almost forgotten the features which love had never stamped upon his brain. But now he remembered them again. Yes. That was the hair which,
when unloosed, rippled past her waist; no July sky was ever more deeply, translucently blue than those eyes; that was the delicately moulded little mouth which never opened to say a sensible word; there was the "tip-tilted" nose that had been wont to curl disdainfully at Mrs. Simes's household arrangements. The sweet, somewhat thin voice sounded in his ears with its eternal burden of complaint, its fretful "Stephen, I must have this," or "I won't bear that."

How tired he had grown of it! How her very beauty had palled on him in its soulless, unvarying fairness! No thought of pity, no twinge of conscience, disturbed him in his contemplation. She had come into his life, had got in his way, and he had put her out of it. That was all. His
action was justified in his own eyes by his will. Remorse, regrets, were for the weak; he, Stephen Baring, was strong enough to stand alone.

END OF VOL. II.