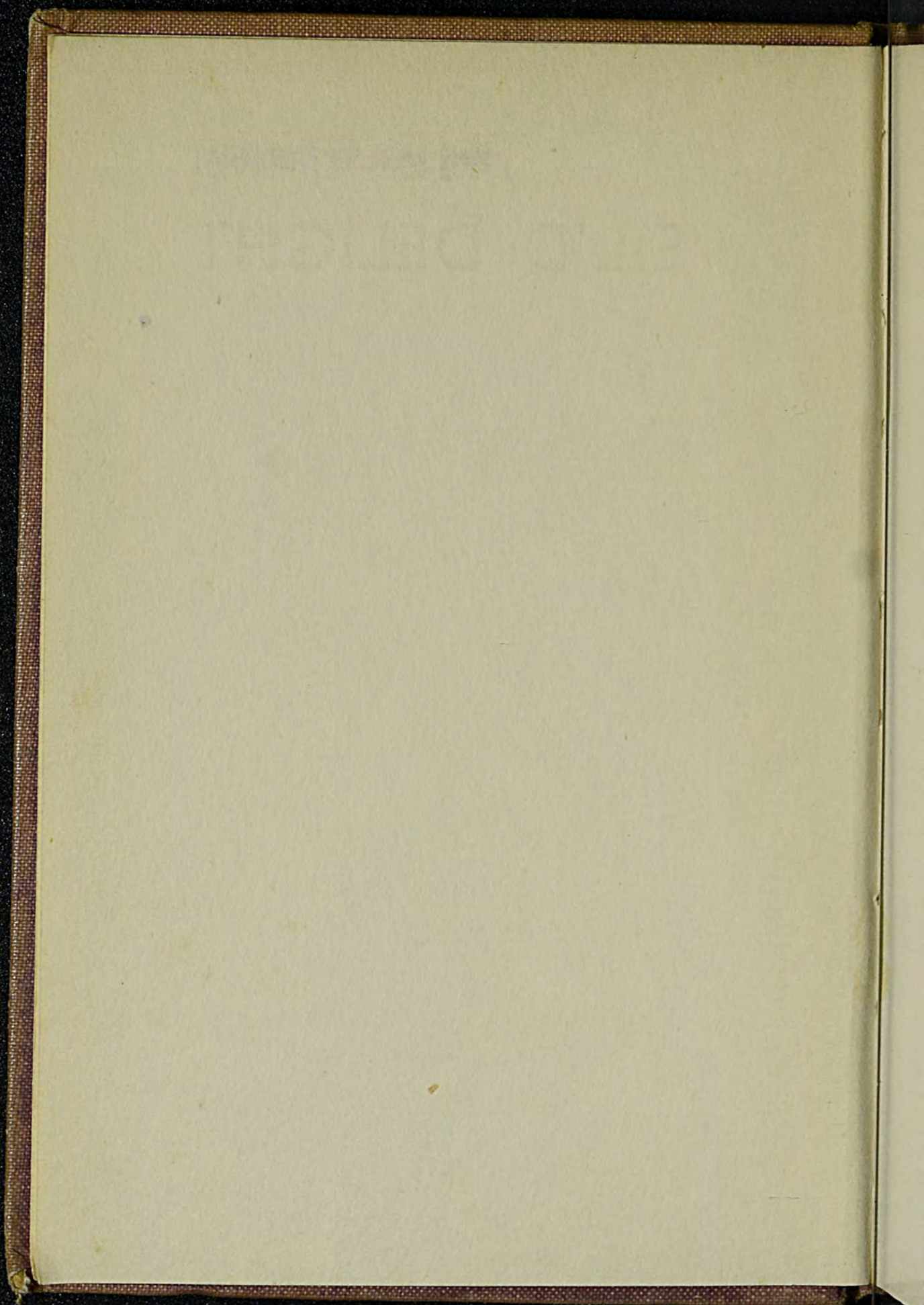


THE VEIL'D DELIGHT



THE VEIL'D DELIGHT

(The Rainbow in the Mirror)

By

MARJORIE BOWEN

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FOREWORD

This novel is founded (the characters being given an obviously needful change of names) on an episode in the history of a family well known in the North of England.

In its day it was considered so startling and sensational that it was for many years suppressed.

The principal actors in this odd drama later changed their names and lived quietly in an Italian town, where their descendants still survive.

The story of Harriet Brodie was expunged from the annals of her purse-proud family; her half-sister, Flora, who married a man of high position in the Government, went so far as to hint that the girl was dead, or worse—put away through the unsettling of her wits. These circumstances have always made it difficult to trace the true tale of a twice-interrupted wedding and the extraordinary power possessed by Henry Darrell, but a chance discovery in a scarce old book of *Memoirs* set the author on the track of material that proved as authentic as it was fascinating.

The events here narrated are evolved from this, and it may be remarked that they took place in a period even more remote from our own in point of feeling and knowledge than in point of time.

A strong belief in sorcery even then lingered in the more remote parts of England, and the unexplained was still ascribed by the ignorant to devilment. The modern reader, however, though perhaps inclined to be sceptical as to much in this odd and moving tale, will recall what

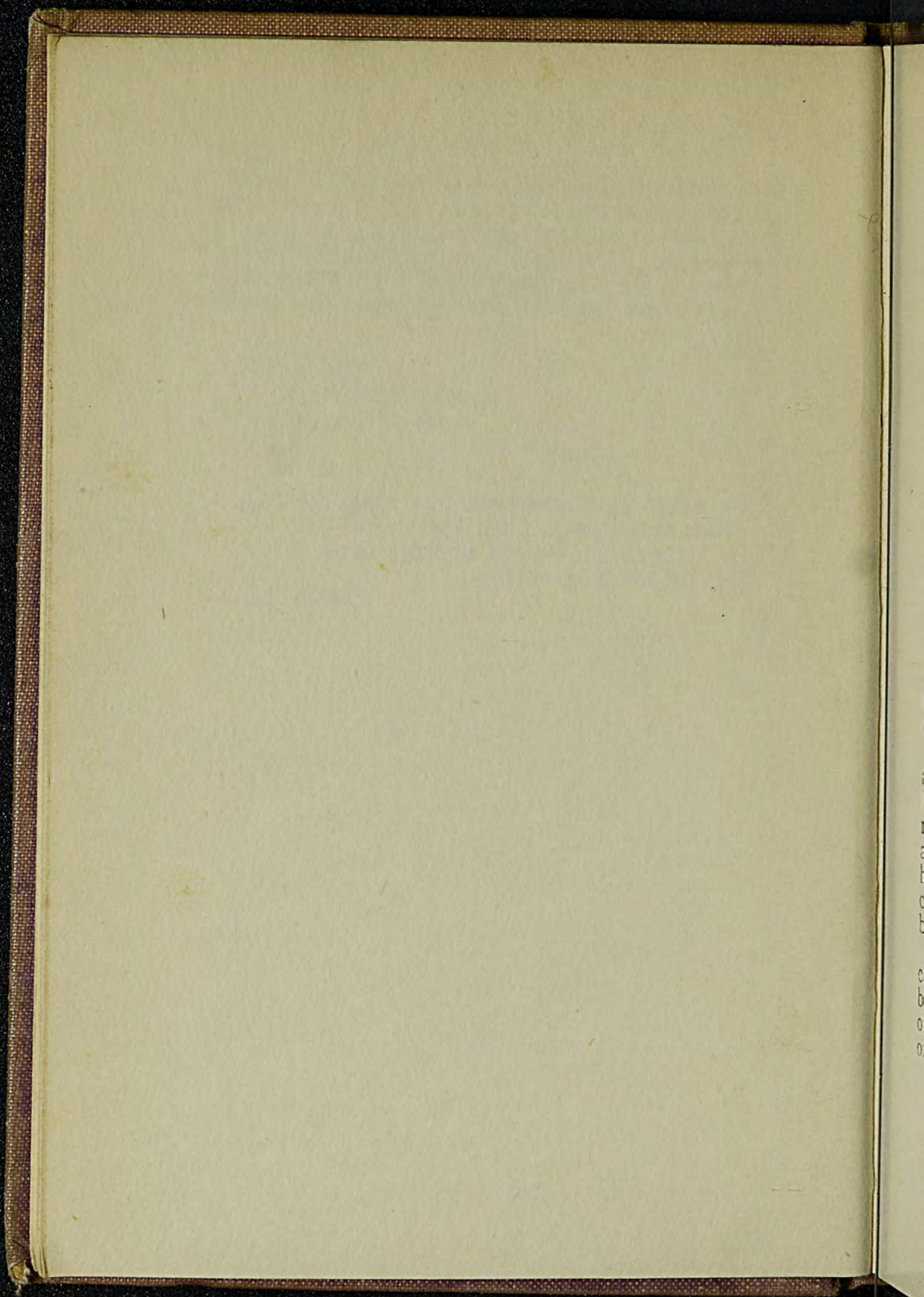
marvels we accept in wireless and television, and will remember the sanction which science has given to telepathy and the recent discoveries as to the extent of the scope of hypnotism, magnetism, and other powers of the mind and soul completely unguessed at nearly two hundred years ago.

M. B.

Chalom House,
Richmond, Surrey.
October 17th, 1933.

“ O, where have you been, my long-lost love,
These seven years past, and more?”
“ O, I am come to mind you the vows
You swore to me before.”

Old Ballad.



CHAPTER I

THE young man's first impulse was to refuse the offer, but he restrained himself, for he could not afford to be imprudent. He stood by the large window of the single room he rented in the house which had once been someone's home but which was now a refuge for the homeless.

A light storm had gathered over London; the ice blue of the sky could be seen behind the vaporous trail of ragged clouds, sunshine here and there cleaved the transient murk with sparkles of gold. It was late summer and there was a sense of emptiness in the city; there had been great heat and a drought, and in this poor quarter there were stale smells and heavy airs, and, had the young man cared to look downwards instead of upwards, he would have seen groups of frowsy people sitting listlessly in doorways or hanging idly out of dirty windows. But he kept his glance resolutely on the shifting heavens.

He was the only lodger in the decayed house and he felt the ancient mansion, which had once been so comfortable and dignified, hollow and remote about him. He looked over his shoulder at stained walls, broken furniture, a ragged bed, his own few and valueless belongings huddled in a corner, and he thought: "Surely anything is better than this."

He forced himself to read over again the offer contained in the letter that he held in his hand, but he could not bring himself to think with relish of the offer that it contained, though it seemed the only prospect he possessed of release from

his present cares. It had come from the sole friend he had who was influential enough to be able to help him in a worldly fashion, and contained this proposition: Would he go as tutor to a boy and two girls at a lonely mansion in the North of England?

The patron who suggested the post did not disguise the fact that it was far from being a desirable one. The master of the establishment, a baronet of an old family, Sir Thomas Brodie, was an eccentric, failing in mind and body, a widower and a careless governor of the number of dependents and servants whom he had gathered round him in the lonely retreat where he reigned as tyrant.

The boy was too delicate to go to school, though it was hoped, eventually, to send him to Eton College. The two girls had grown up in the care of servants and it might be presumed that they were wild and difficult, and their father, suddenly awakening to a sense of responsibility, had decided they had outgrown a governess' authority.

At this point Henry Darrell smiled, mocking at himself. What had he to do with teaching an ailing boy and two silly, pampered girls?

He folded the letter carefully into the pocket of his worn suit, and thrusting his hands behind his coat skirts, again gazed steadfastly at the shifting, breaking clouds which were now tinged with a violet-pink colour and breaking over the uneven lines of the filthy chimney pots in a brilliant haze of rain.

The air of the room, which for several months had been Henry Darrell's sole refuge, was sunless and seemed rank and tainted. He had disliked

the place from the moment that he had first forced himself to accept it as the best that his miserable means could afford, and since then it was rendered further distasteful to him by the accumulated melancholy of his own disappointments. It had seen so many restless nights, so many useless days, he had filled it with such a number of hours of painful meditation, of casting over the past and vainly striving to build up the future.

How often had he returned to this wretched room after a useless search for employment? How often had he stood at that window with no comfort or relief from his surroundings and his thoughts save the stretch of sky above the dingy houses opposite?

He was twenty-eight years of age, but a vast weight of experience and a vast space of time seemed to lie between him and his youth. His childhood seemed already remote, clear-cut and precise and unreal as a picture out of a book.

He had come of honourable gentlefolk and a dwindling family; his early days had been passed in a secure dignity and comfort. His first tastes had been scholarly, but the chance of war had swept him into a life of action, and the chance of peace had left him bereaved and lonely in a broken world. He had known ten years of adventure and vicissitudes, which had left him enriched in mind but poor in pocket. He was no longer needed as a soldier, and those who had not gone to the war occupied the scholastic posts that he might once have hoped to attain.

His parents were dead, the only relatives that he possessed were strangers to him and he did not care to apply to them for any help—that would seem like asking for charity. He was well

educated and had a taste for graceful learning, but his poverty and lack of recommendation had prevented him from putting these assets to any good account. Now, after weeks of waiting in the ante-chambers of possible patrons, after useless visits to academies and schools and agencies that supplied tutors and bear-leaders for young lords going on the Continent, he was reduced to this one chance, which, as he reminded himself grimly, would not have come his way if it had been a good chance.

He watched wistfully the delicate storm gather above the dreary lines of the houses opposite. He had always valued his independence, and if he accepted this position he would lose that—almost his last possession—for he knew something of what it was to fill a position in the house of a great man. He might be considered a little above the servants but he would be worse treated, and it would be difficult to choose between a loathsome servility which would assure him his livelihood and a stiff surliness that would lose it.

He turned back to the room and seated himself at the broken table in the corner which held his few toilet appointments and the worn writing-box which had accompanied him through three campaigns. His intention was to write a grateful refusal of the post as tutor to Sir Thomas Brodie's three children, but his prudence again stayed his hand. He recalled, without bitterness, for his was a sweet nature, but with some irony, that this independence which he valued so highly and guarded so jealously would not long be his if he remained in London under his present circumstances. His little hoard of money, though so carefully parcelled out for mere necessities, sank

daily to a dangerous lowness. There had been a moment when he might have gone abroad and risked his fortune in new lands, but now, and he realised this with a little stab of panic, he lacked the means to purchase his passage or equipment.

It was very quiet in the forlorn, dishevelled house. He remembered that he was probably alone in it save for the landlady and her daughter in the basement, and he leant back in his stiff stained chair and stared at a little mirror, dim and tarnished, in a frame of pierced metal that stood on a corner of the table at which he sat. This had been in his bedchamber at home when he was a boy, he had taken it with him on all his travels, always remembering to slip it carefully into his travelling-case before he packed it in his humble baggage. At first he had been amused, then moved to tenderness, then held by a slight sense of superstitious awe at the thought that, whatever his adventures, the mirror had never been broken or cracked.

He looked now into the greenish depths of the ancient glass and saw his own thin, comely face with the grey eyes and dark hair and the clean threadbare neckcloth reflected as if in water. He had seen many things in the old mirror besides his own face, and lately in his long hours of enforced idleness, perhaps a little lightheaded from hunger, for his meals were few and sparse, and giddy from fatigue, for he was accustomed to walk miles up and down the city, he had felt that he had the decisive power to draw into the mirror any picture that he might wish to see. Common sense had impatiently dismissed this fancy, yet some instinct of spiritual hope had clung to it; yes, and there was one vision that came unbidden.

He had compromised on calling it an amusement, allowable, surely, for one who had no manner of diversion beyond reading the thumbèd Greek and Latin books with the cracked backs that were no longer of sufficient value to sell.

To distract himself from the momentous and painful decision that he must make Henry Darrell strived to concentrate on the mirror and to evoke in it some glory of fantasy, but none came. He thought, however, that he perceived instead faint memories which floated, transparent images, behind the dim reflection of his own face.

The first was that poignant vision that was never long absent from his mind—the home of his childhood, which already seemed so far away. Like the scene observed through the wrong end of a spy or perspective glass he glimpsed (with a tender humour) his father's rectory on the verge of Romney Marsh—there was his mother in her garden tying up roses after a heavy fall of rain. He had an exact likeness of her pasted into the fly-leaf of his Virgil—a crayon drawing, flat, but accurate, a woman with straight features, level-browed, grey English eyes like his own, a determined mouth and a fine figure—in that, too, she something resembled her son.

In the depths of the mirror he could see her working in the garden. She wore a dress of a dull violet tabinet, white stockings, black lachet shoes, a white cambric apron and a pelisse of red cloth, for the weather was cloudy and there was a chill in the wind. He could remember all this without the mirror—a pretty garden and a pretty house, square, with red-tiled front and rising roof on which grew the succulent pink and green house leeks. In front a small square of neat green

bisected by a path and planted with some golden shrubs divided the house from the high road.

He could see himself, a little child, standing in that neat garden and trying to glimpse into the rooms beyond the flowers on the sill and the shrouding curtains, but baffled by the gloom of shadow within. How the fine varnish on the door shone, and the handle of brass rubbed pale and clear as gold!

A grass path edged with lavender bushes led through the garden to a little orchard of damson and quince trees beneath which stood a row of beehives, and all the little domain was surrounded by an ancient hawthorn hedge high as a man and as thick as a brick wall, always a dense green, in Henry Darrell's thoughts, and covered with the pearly buds of the May bloom.

He broke through his dreams with the sharp question: "Shall I or shall I not take this intolerable post in the north? It seems as if I must decide."

He stared across the shabby room at the square of the large window. The storm was darkening down over the city, but he hardly saw it for the memory of the little rectory was strong upon him, the neat and well-arranged gardens, beyond the lavender the vegetables in straight, accurate rows, and in front of the lavender a two-foot border of bright flowers. Often, sleeping in the trenches or on the monotonous march, he had remembered, to distract himself, the names of these long-withered blooms—solomon's seal, columbine, jacob's ladder, yellow daisies, bluebells, the green of poppies and lilies, sweet williams and carnations, iris, goat's beard, lamb's wool, and at intervals the roses, in single bushes and arches

trained across the path. And among them his mother's capable hands busy lifting up the lustrous dripping foliage and tying it with strips of clean straw to the stakes and trellises.

When crouching on the defiled ground with a flint-lock in his hand he had thought so often of that garden and that scene which in his childhood he had accepted as the only possible garden and the only possible scene for peace and happiness. So now the miserable room which seemed saturate with the wretchedness of former lodgers and his own long-endured melancholy was eclipsed by that memory of the rich fields sloping down to Romney Marsh where the miles of watery pasture looked golden green after the rain, and where beyond all was the faint line of the yellow sands and the blue sea. The thrush, the robin, the black-bird, and countless finches made the garden their home; from the copse below the orchard came the call of the cuckoo, swallows skimmed to and fro, and in the meadows the lambs cried to the ewes. It was as pretty a pastoral as one could wish to see, and he would never see it again.

"Ah, well," Henry Darrell passed his hand over his forehead. An unutterable weariness bowed his heart.

He stared again into the mirror. He had long been used to a life of hardship and chance and was confident in his own powers, but the long-continued disappointments had worn away his courage and his humour and it seemed that the old mirror had failed him, would give him only this one picture, and as he tried earnestly to stare past his own reflection and to see others in the dull green depths of the glass which was slightly waved like a standing pool ruffled by a small breeze, all

he could see were the blurred, dissolving outlines of episodes he wished to forget—a French *château* in Flanders, two drunken dragoons disappointed in their thirst for wine and food smashing costly vases of a celestial blue on a marble hearth; a huge fort crowning a hill, spitting fire and smoke; a half-dismantled inn where a girl with a thin smiling face, in an old gown of lilac taffeta, with dirty white stockings and broken shoes, brought acrid wine on a stained tray; a white horse, dying in the mud, with bloodshot eyes glazing in the freezing air. And over all this, like a palimpsest, his early life—the house, the garden, the invalid scholarly father, the precise housekeeping mother, the familiar neighbourhood, the placid countryside, the well-ordered life and the good food, and the little drives in the pony-chaise, the roses to tie up, to clip, to pluck, and the flower border to watch fade and bloom again, the orchard passing from bareness to flower, the marsh fields from flood to grazing land.

Impatient with himself, Henry Darrell moved with the stiff violence of one who forces his inclination and even a little his character. He took up the pen; the sound of the rain beating swiftly and gently on the fly-blown panes was in the room. It was like an incantation, clearing that pale stillness.

The young man glanced expectantly into the mirror, forgetting the letter and all his odious fortunes. Sometimes she came at such a moment, when his thoughts had turned for a second elsewhere, and there was a little wind or a slight rain to disperse the hateful atmosphere of the alien room.

Who was she? He did not know, nor did he dare to name her save only as his “veil’d

delight." She had scarcely shape or countenance, and he often told himself with scorn that she was not really there but merely a phantom, created by his under-nourished body and too-active brain, concentrated and beheld for him in the old mirror. With painfully sought explanations he had laboured with himself to clear from his heart this cherished deception as one half of a man will always endeavour to correct the sweet cheating in which the other half rejoices and lives.

She was, of course, a memory, some face seen, perhaps, in his childhood in that very garden and house that his too-sharpened fancy had just conjured up. Perhaps she, like himself, had lived in the little village beneath the squat Gothic church on the gentle hill where right and left were orchards (always covered with rosy blooms, in his memory) and low, lush meadows filled with sheep and young lambs. Perhaps she had sat in the small parlour where he as a little boy had always moved with discomfort and apprehension, where innumerable ornaments stood on little shelves and tables, where in summer was a fire-screen with a scarlet parrot, in wool, and on a centre table his mother's work, and at the window his mother's canary and in a corner her desk and bookcase.

Perhaps she, this "veil'd delight" of his, was only the memory of some girl who had stood beside his mother when she had tied up the roses and followed her to the gardener's shed when she had put away her scissors and her basket and sat with her in the dark parlour where the old clergyman would be reading the newspaper and waiting for his dish of tea.

Perhaps when he had been ill in Flanders, a short delirium, a long weakness after a flesh

wound, she had passed by. Perhaps she had never existed at all, was but the creation of his starved fantasy.

At least, this wraith was not in the mirror to-night.

He caught himself up at these words—"Not to-night," why had he said "to-night?" It was early afternoon, that darkening in the gaunt chamber was only a passing storm.

The young man's dreams, for a second rosy and delicate as sun-flushed foam bubbles, now, as foam bubbles, vanished, leaving emptiness behind.

"I ought to accept, I ought not to allow this despondency to overwhelm me. I have shrunk from nothing as yet, and I should not shrink from the possibility of slight or unkindness from a paymaster, and, who knows, there may be some among the household who are sympathetic or indulgent."

But he knew, even as he argued thus, that he was endeavouring to deceive himself, for the friend who had offered him the post had informed him frankly that several other young men, though desperate enough in circumstances, had refused to remain in Criffel Hall. "But perhaps none of them was quite so forlorn and hopeless as I am. And surely there would be more liberty of mind, if not of body, in such a post than in remaining here, starving on the few pence I might earn by hack-work for the booksellers or copying music and law documents at a few pence a sheet."

These common-sense thoughts were again interrupted by a sudden unaccountable expectation which was so strong that he leant forward and whispered: "Yes, dear?" in a questioning tone, and it was as if there was a curious scent in the

room, the dusty, sugary scent of some flower not commonly acknowledged to have a perfume but yielding this peculiar favour to the curious.

Then that was gone, and there seemed a sound and a movement at the window, that was more than the sound of the light wind shaking the casement, or the movement of the raindrops running one into another down the soiled panes.

An old song that the young man had learned from a pious Scots soldier who had lain dying by his side all one summer night came into his mind:

“ Who is at my windo, who, who?
Go from my windo, go, go!
Who calls there, so like a stranger?
Go from my windo, go!”

He became conscious of a light in the room, and this light came, surely, from the mirror. He turned quickly, and in the heart of the dim, ancient glass, observed, not what he hoped to see—the pale glitter of a woman like a lily-bud not yet pure white but still veined with tender green and sparkling with moisture, but a rainbow, faint as the reflection of a flower in glass. The aerial colours quivered in the murky shade and faded as he looked.

He rose and went to the window. There was a transient, watery sunshine in the heavens from which the rain-clouds, dusted with gold, floated away. He believed that he saw the last fading of the rainbow above the ugly housefront opposite.

“ But, surely,” he thought, “ it was not possible for me to see that in the mirror.”

Even as he stared the frail beauty had gone, brief as the fabled purple flower whose birth and

death is within the compass of a second. The clouds rushed swiftly together, the spears of light were hidden, the street became dun-coloured, the chamber dark, the mirror reflected only dissolving shadows which departed and left but a disquieting emptiness behind.

The glimpse of the rainbow in the mirror had done much to efface the young man's sense of foreboding and mistrust; his constancy and his fortitude revived. He returned to the broken table and wrote an acceptance of what seemed a position so commonplace, so monotonous, so restricted. "But I must set myself free of foolish dreams. I must go on and take my fortune."

He signed and sealed his letter with a haste that disguised an extreme reluctance. Then, lest he might be tempted by delusions and fantasies, he slipped the mirror into its rough, worn, goatskin travelling case, and resolved to unclasp it no more, but to apply himself to matters of every day.

CHAPTER II

THE day was pure and bright as if it graced an Italian spring instead of an English autumn. The sky spread azure and almost unclouded over the gently rising uplands, and the last dry leaves gave intermingled hues of bronze, gold, and crimson to the sweeping woods where the steady sunlight fell on the smooth boughs disclosed by the thinning leaves.

The short, thick grass was still green on the moors across which Henry Darrell rode; here and there the last bramble leaves, purple blotched, hung among the red berries of the stunted hawthorn. The young man, slowly walking his tired horse which was burdened with his modest baggage as well as his own person, across the wide moors, felt his heart lift at this prospect, so bright and smiling, so fair and serene all about him, and something of the fatigue of disillusion and bitter expectation passed from his mood. His pride, which had been and still must be so humbled, was soothed, and from the gentle beauty of the mountain landscape he drew some strength to face the distasteful life on which he was about to enter. However unpleasant he found the circumstances at Criffel Hall—and before he had left London he had had an interview with the friend who had procured him the post which had given him no secure hope of anything agreeable in Sir Thomas Brodie's household—there would always be, he thought to console himself, these moors, these woods, to which he could escape.

In the distance there were mountains the colour of a dead violet, and he knew there were lakes hidden somewhere in the hills, and tarns high up among the rocky peaks. They must allow him some liberty, and in those intervals in his servitude he could surely find not only strength but pleasure in this landscape which was so different from the landscape he remembered—the marshes, the flat pasture, the trim vicarage, and the flowering garden, but yet which attracted him.

“Well, I am a fool to make so much of it and to let this loneliness grow on me,” he reproved himself. “It is only because I dread them as strangers and masters, the whims and caprices of pampered children, the tyrannical moods of a senile old man. Maybe it will not endure long—who knows what chance may lie ahead of me?”

A lawyer had interviewed him in London on the behalf of Sir Thomas Brodie, and had paid him what was, to his humble fortunes, a substantial sum of money for his journey and equipment, and the salary was high beyond his hopes. Yet he had not liked the peremptory tone that the lawyer had used, and the position offered him ill-accorded with the ambitions of one who had started life with prospects so different, who had been in command of men, who had faced adventure and every manner of active vicissitude, but who had never been nor thought to be in a position of servitude.

The London lawyer, who had coldly admitted a certain eccentricity in the character and behaviour of his noble client, had not been able to do more than vaguely indicate the day on which Sir Thomas Brodie wished his new tutor to arrive, but Henry Darrell, eager to face the future and impatient to leave the drab lodgings which had

for too long housed his melancholy, had followed quickly on the letter, heavily crested and handsomely sealed, which had arrived from Criffel Hall engaging his services.

A shawled shepherd on the moors gave him his directions and stared after him with frank curiosity. And there, suddenly, out of the loneliness, it rose before him—the great gates, the high walls above which rose dark and magnificent trees, the lodge, in itself far larger and more splendid than his own home.

The young man reined up his horse. As he approached the great house he began to feel an awkward embarrassment lest he was unexpected or had arrived at some inconvenient hour, and, so little used was he to waiting attendance on the great, that he winced with mortification when he observed the stateliness of the lodge, the splendour of the parklands.

Then he smiled at his own weakness and passed, unchallenged as he noticed, through the magnificent gates of heavy iron scrollwork. About him were sweeping, shaven lawns and exotic trees. At the end of the long drive was a magnificent mansion.

It was still early in the day and the haughty pile lay full in the beams of the autumn sun. The place was pretentious, modern, and showed a cold, conventional taste. Mr. Darrell thought there was something repellent about the massive classic façade fronted by bare terraces with a winged staircase that fronted, stiff and ungracious, the rich and noble English parklands.

“It is as dreary,” thought the new tutor in dismay, “as my little room in London, and no more of a home.”

So he tried to comfort himself. The great house spoke of wealth and nothing but wealth, yet he had to admit that this was impressive and he could not repress the weakness that made him conscious of his hired horse, his poor attire, and shabby baggage.

Slowly, and with as much reluctance as he had advanced under the covered ways to the redoubt with the bullets falling around him, he proceeded to the dreary gravel sweep in front of the terraces. He now perceived that there were two of these, one rising above another, and connected by shallow steps. At the end of the balustrade stood gigantic and, to Mr. Darrell's taste, grotesque classic figures, whose stone draperies seemed fluttered by an invisible wind and frozen by a perpetual cold.

He looked round in vain for someone to take his horse and he sensed that the establishment was as careless as it was luxurious.

"Perhaps," he thought, "I am not expected, despite my precise letter announcing my arrival, or perhaps it is intended for me to go to the back door. Well, I would very willingly do so did I know where it was."

He dismounted, and leading his horse, walked to the bottom of one of the wings of the wide stone staircase, and looking up, perceived a group of people in the turn of the high balustrade. This sight increased Mr. Darrell's embarrassment, for he feared that he would have to introduce himself to many people at once, and probably to enter into humiliating explanations. He soon saw, however, that he need not concern himself with these fears, for the people on the stairs were deeply absorbed in some affair of their own.

The group consisted of men and women too finely dressed, the new tutor thought, for the country, who seemed to be arguing together, protesting, one with the other, in some agitation or anger.

Mr. Darrell was half-minded to mount his tired horse and ride away again out of the ostentatious park on to the noble moors and return presently when this domestic matter, whatever it was, should have been settled. But even as he made this resolution round the side of the mansion from the stables came a coach with handsome horses and liveried lacqueys hanging to the leathers at the back.

Mr. Darrell mounted and moved out of the way among the trees, chestnuts and limes, that hedged the avenue that led to the mansion. He ceased to think of himself in the detached, amused interest he felt in the scene before him. It was as if, after his long and tedious journey, he had suddenly found himself seated in a theatre before a sumptuous and incomprehensible entertainment. The vast house which had looked so blank and lonely became, on a sudden, alive with people—on the stairs, on the terrace, at the head of the avenue, were lacqueys and servants, and several people gathered on the steps beside the main group on the turn of the stairway.

Among all these, who certainly were preparing for some spectacle or festival, Mr. Darrell was for a while unperceived and could scrutinise the others at leisure.

The group that he had at first observed began, in a stately fashion, to descend the steps. There were, Mr. Darrell thought, about a dozen people, all gesticulating and talking, and he received that

blurred impression of them which is common to a first glance at the unexpected and the unfamiliar. His attention was attracted by a young girl who walked in the centre of the main knot of people. He noticed her, partly because of her gown which was of white trimmed with silver, and partly because of her dull and listless appearance which was so intense as to have the effect of isolating her from all the movement and clatter about her.

To the young man's interested and delicate perception she seemed isolated, almost as if she were alone. There was something vague about her personality so that though he frowned in an effort of concentration, he could scarcely tell himself what she was like beyond that she was very young and slight and colourless and had no beauty as beauty is commonly accepted. But it was her disinterestedness which puzzled him; there was something almost vacant in her aspect, as if she were sleep-walking or clouded in her wits. Her whole figure and expression gave Mr. Darrell a poignant sense of melancholy. As she approached in the midst of the busy little group, he forgot his own case, and so intense was his gaze on her that she perceived it, even in the midst of her abstraction and even across the distance that separated them.

As she reached the last step of the wide stone stairway and set her foot upon the gravel, she looked at him where he sat his horse in the shade of the chestnut tree. She made a step forward and seemed to be about to advance to greet him, but the woman beside her touched her elbow and distracted her attention.

The tutor was, through this incident, perceived by the whole group and a lacquey sent to question

him. This brought the young man's thoughts back to himself; the moment was sharply unpleasant, he had to explain himself to a stupid, ill-trained country servant who seemed to have much difficulty in understanding his case. But when at last the man had gone into the house to acquaint, he said indifferently, either the librarian or the chaplain of the new tutor's arrival, the young man, who had once more dismounted, remained standing awkward and wretched by his horse.

He perceived the lacquey approach the group by the stairs and give the information of the arrival of the new tutor to a stout man who seemed to be an upper servant and who received the news with a careless nod.

"So," thought Mr. Darrell, "I am neither expected nor desired." And again the misery of his dependent position presented itself to him with painful forcefulness.

But the group round the stairs had again forgotten his most unimportant presence. They were absorbed in the girl, who seemed the centre of their attentions. She had seated herself on the last of the stone steps with her hands clasped in the lap of her white silk dress, and shook her head sullenly to and fro with a gesture of firm refusal. With agitation, with anger, with vehement protest and forced kindness, those about her tried to persuade her into some course of action which she continued to refuse stubbornly and silently.

The new tutor was so utterly ignored that he had no sense of eavesdropping in observing this strange scene, and again he had the impression that he was staring at some set piece on the stage, yet one that he could not understand. It was as if he had arrived late in the middle of an act and

had no clue as to the proceedings among the actors and actresses. Here and there he caught a word or a sentence, but they meant nothing. All that was clear was that the girl was refusing all of them.

She still preserved her remarkable air of detachment, and presently, resting her elbow on her knee and her face in her hands, she closed her eyes as if she were asleep or withdrawn into a trance. The small, obstinate face under the elaborate wreath of slightly powdered hair was that of a child, and Mr. Darrell felt an uneasy impulse of pity for the little creature, and a foolish desire to rescue her from her tormentors, for such they seemed to be, urging on her some action which she abhorred.

He was recalled to a sense of the reality of his position by the arrival of a groom who took his horse and indicated to him, brusquely enough, a side door where he might report himself.

"This is all as distasteful as I imagined it would be," thought the new tutor; yet a certain curiosity impelled him towards the house. Already, and against, it seemed to him, his own volition, he felt himself involved in the fortunes of these people among whom he had come to live, and the shabby room in London seemed no longer part of himself, but merely another picture in his mind.

The servant in a pretentious livery admitted him through the side door, up an elegant staircase to a handsome antechamber which gave on to a large library.

CHAPTER III

THE two lofty rooms intercommunicated, and Henry Darrell walked from one to the other during the full hour of waiting he had to put through.

The servant had informed him, with a half-insolent familiarity that had shown the new tutor at once how lightly he was to be regarded by the household, that someone would see him in a while, but that for the moment all were occupied.

Though the two apartments were furnished in a costly manner they did not impress Mr. Darrell more favourably than had the exterior of the pretentious house. Dust lay on the books that filled the shelves, and in the marble features and robes of the conventional classic busts that stood in niches between the tall windows. There was a litter of papers and crayons, of embroidery silks and novels on the chairs; a richly painted vase held some dead brown roses, corrupting in stagnant water that slightly tainted the enclosed air.

Every moment of his waiting the new tutor felt more depressed and forlorn and he was at last reduced to vowing that he would, under some excuse, escape as soon as possible from this repellent household, every detail of which that he had as yet seen gave evidence of wealth, of a cold, uncultured taste, of disorder and neglect, jarred upon his nature. In his nervous state he began to fancy there was a studied insult in the long delay, and had almost decided to refuse to take up the

proffered post. He thought with delight of claiming his hired hack, his shabby baggage and riding away to the humble inn in the moorland village and there, when he had paused to ask his way, in some quiet chamber, once more possessing his soul in peace.

Why, how mean it seemed to cringe to these people for food and shelter and a few guineas to jingle in his pocket, when he was young and strong and had the world before him! Ay, and the mirror in which the rainbow had been mirrored—the rainbow and something else that he would not name even to his secret thoughts—safe in his baggage.

These angry resolutions were suddenly interrupted by the entry of an old man of disarming kindness and meekness of appearance. He was untidy, unshaved, and unwashed, his soiled shirt was stained with snuff droppings, and a ragged turban was twisted carelessly round his bald head. But the small, inflamed eyes behind the silver-rimmed spectacles gleamed with kindness and good humour. The thin lips were curved into an indulgent smile, and the manner was that of a gentleman, and one eager to please.

"Dear, dear! I am sorry that you have been kept waiting so long, sir, indeed I am. It is all my fault, and I must beg you to excuse me. But to-day is rather a special occasion; oh, yes, you might call it a most special occasion and rather unfortunate also——"

The old man paused and gazed at Mr. Darrell in what seemed a mild perplexity.

"Are you Sir Thomas Brodie, sir?" asked the new tutor, hoping that this might be so and that he saw before him the eccentric master of the

house. But the old man shook his head with a whimsical air.

"No, no, I'm Mr. Bonthron—Peter Bonthron, the librarian." He put down a box that he carried under his arm and rubbed his knotted, soiled hands together as he glanced round the books. "I dare say you don't think much of my work, sir. Fresh from London, or the Universities, or some laborious studies, no doubt, sir?"

He spoke as vaguely as amiably and Mr. Darrell perceived that he knew nothing whatever of himself.

"I am merely the new tutor," he said pleasantly. "I don't think it matters where I come from. I believe I have had several predecessors."

"Tutors!—for Master Harry. Ah, yes! A delicate boy, but a good child." The old librarian seemed nervous. "And then there are the two sisters. Of course," he broke off, "Sir Thomas would have received you himself but just to-day, you see——" he paused, seemingly at a loss, and again he stared with an ashamed glance at the dusty, dishevelled lines of books. "You've been waiting here long enough, sir," he observed with some humour, "to notice that I don't take my duties very seriously. But then, Sir Thomas don't care much for books, and there's a great deal else I have to do. Oh, yes, quite a deal else. Now you'll be wanting a rest, a meal, and to see your room."

"No, sir, I am in no such haste. I was well refreshed at an inn on the moor——" and he hesitated, half tempted to inform the kindly old man of his resolution to depart from the house that he disliked so much.

Mr. Bonthron seemed to sense something of what was in the young man's mind.

"Perhaps you'd like some information about the family, Mr. Darrell?"

"Yes, anything that you can tell me—it's difficult coming as a complete stranger."

"Oh, yes, I suppose so," agreed the librarian mildly. "I've been with Sir Thomas a good many years and got accustomed to his ways and I've seen the children grow up and got accustomed to them, too. But I believe it does strike the stranger always as a little odd and difficult."

"Why?" asked Mr. Darrell shortly and without sympathy.

Mr. Bonthron gave him a kindly, almost a humble look.

"I've got used to it and I'm quite content here. This is my life, and I shouldn't care to go anywhere else now. It is the same with Madame Duchène—she came with the first Lady Brodie from France and she's used to it."

Henry Darrell felt this garrulity tedious and could scarcely conceal his impatience. He longed to be away, out in the air; the crowded, untidy library seemed like a prison.

"Well, tell me of my pupils," he asked with forced courtesy. "There is a young boy, I think, delicate, and not able to study much."

"He's had one or two tutors," replied Mr. Bonthron, "and I have done my best with him myself. He is not so difficult, it's the young ladies. Of course, Madame Duchène has instructed them up to a point, and Mr. Moffatt, the chaplain, gives them lessons in divinity."

"Young ladies!" exclaimed the new tutor, who had never thought to inquire the ages of his

prospective pupils. "I thought they were children?"

"Well, scarcely that, though they seem so to me, an old man, sir. Indeed, Miss Flora, she's twenty-one or twenty-two this winter. I forget the exact year——"

Henry Darrell interrupted, vexed,

"She is long past the age for lessons."

Mr. Bonthron laughed.

"Lessons out of books, perhaps, and yet she's a mind for those and thinks herself quite scholarly and reads philosophy, and delves into Greek and Latin. The other young lady, Miss Harriet, is only seventeen, and Master Harry was thirteen this summer. You see, sir, these two are children of a second marriage. Miss Flora is a great heiress through her mother and quite independent of them all. You'll find that she's the mistress here, sir, for Sir Thomas takes less and less notice of things every week, even I can see that, and I dare say it would be very noticeable to a stranger."

"I don't think I should care to put myself under a young woman."

"No, they don't," said the librarian with a smile. "You've got to get used to it. It depends," he pursed up his lips, "on your circumstances, of course."

"They're desperate enough," Mr. Darrell smiled too, "or I shouldn't be here. The war, you know. The world seems a little broken to me, and I have to do what I can. It was only by soliciting a patron's aid that I obtained this place."

"You'll keep it," said the old librarian shrewdly, "if Miss Flora likes you."

The new tutor smiled to cover his swift sense of humiliation.

"Then I don't think that I shall stay, whatever else awaits me outside," he added in his heart.

The librarian shrugged his lean, bent shoulders.

"Why, sir, if it suits you you can overlook the humours of a spoilt young woman. I assure you I don't mind her at all however much she teases."

This assurance was but poor comfort to the new tutor, who knew his position to be very different from that of one who, in his own words, had been for years a member of the household.

"There's plenty of money and comfort and luxury and leisure here," continued the old librarian, as if putting forward the best side of a bad case, "and there are pleasant neighbours and a fine estate, and a good many rural amusements. We get books and papers and everything you could want for sent from Newcastle and York and London. The only thing that is wrong——" he helped himself out with looks and shrugs, "well, I suppose, sir, that you would name it temper on the part of Miss Flora, and a certain strangeness on the part of Miss Harriet and the fact that the girls are motherless. Sir Thomas has been married three times, sir, and all his ladies dead. And he's getting quite an old man now—he's older than I am—and he doesn't take much interest in anything but his medals."

"What is happening here to-day?" asked Mr. Darrell. He took a restless turn about the room and came to a pause in front of the old man. "Who were those people whom I saw on the steps of the terrace?"

"Why, that was a wedding party," said Mr.

Bonthron with a chuckle. "Miss Harriet was to have been married to-day, but at the last minute she refused and it's all been postponed. It is a strange time for you to have arrived. You ought to have been warned—but then, they never think of anything here. It was all arranged rather suddenly," he added in anxious excuse.

"That was Miss Harriet then, the girl in white whom I saw seated on the steps shaking her head, and all the others trying to persuade her?"

"Yes, it must be confessed that she is very tiresome. She seemed only this morning quite willing. But she has her moods—she's a little strange. Not weak in the intellect, oh, no," said the old man with as much force as if he were answering an accusation, "but she's strange and rather idle and tiresome. It must be confessed that she and Miss Flora quarrel."

"It is odd for the younger sister to marry first, and at so tender an age," remarked Henry Darrell. There had returned before his mind very vividly the picture of the girl with the indifferent expression seated on the steps, shaking her head obstinately to and fro, and then propping her cheek in her hand and her elbow on her knee and closing her eyes as if she were withdrawn into a trance.

"Sir Thomas thought she'd be better out of the way. There's no match round here fit for Miss Flora——" the old man broke off as if afraid of having said too much. With an air of glossing something over he added hastily: "You see, Esquire Steele and Miss Harriet grew up together in a way, though he's years older than she is, while Miss Flora was in London and abroad. And

she's always seemed pleased enough to have him, been fond of him and talked of him as her future sweetheart ever since she was twelve years old. But when it comes to it, it was like to-day—a refusal."

"He is trying to tell me," thought Mr. Darrell with an intense sense of discomfort, "that the girl is feeble-minded or given to fits of insanity."

Mr. Bonthron glanced at him shrewdly and a little apprehensively the young man thought. Then, pulling his soiled handkerchief out of his torn pocket hole, he took off his glasses and polished them nervously.

"Well, Sir Thomas will be seeing you presently when all the excitement's died away a little. Of course, it was to have been a very private wedding—only a few neighbours asked. The Esquire Steele's estates march with this."

"It must have been confoundedly unpleasant for him," remarked Mr. Darrell.

"Oh, I don't suppose he was altogether unprepared. He knows her ways. But he's very much in love with her," added the old librarian hastily, "oh, yes, he's very much in love with her and quite a fine young man. And I don't doubt when all her whimsies are over they'll be very happy together."

He paused, coughed, took a pinch of snuff, then, observing that the young man's clear grey eyes were fixed on him with a glance of humorous understanding, he added with dignity:

"I hope you don't think I've been gossiping over the affairs of the illustrious family that I have the honour to serve, sir? It is only that I thought a little foreknowledge——"

"A little forewarning," corrected Mr. Darrell.
"I quite understand you, sir."

"Well, I don't know," said Mr. Bonthron rather pensively, "perhaps you don't quite understand me. But then, you'll see them all and judge for yourself."

CHAPTER IV

WHILE he awaited an interview with his employer, the new tutor was shown into his apartments, which were sufficiently to his taste to console him slightly for his uncere-
monious reception and the sense of depression caused by the dreary and austere divided household of which the good-natured librarian had drawn so unpleasing a picture.

An indifferent and careless housekeeper informed him that as Mr. Moffatt, the chaplain, had appropriated the rooms occupied by the last tutor who had departed about three months ago, she had given him, sooner than dislodge the chaplain, rooms in the older part of the house which had been so arrogantly masked by the modern façade. One large room and a closet, she suggested, would perhaps be sufficient for the tutor's needs, but her tone and glance suggested that perhaps he would not be requiring the apartments for a long period.

Mr. Darrell felt no cause for complaint. The room into which he was shown was the most pleasing of any he had seen in the ostentatious house. It was large, and the windows looked eastward across a noble stretch of parkland; the furniture, though old-fashioned, was rich and comfortable. And the discarded, though valuable, tapestries on the wall with their faded tints of mignonette green and indigo blue, pleased the young man's fancy.

The room had been appointed by an older, and

as he in his loneliness thought, a more gracious and cultured generation, and the atmosphere was tranquil and soothing. He was perfectly aware that this was considered an out-of-the-way and mean apartment and that all the more commodious quarters were occupied by the crowd of useless people who comprised the cumbrous establishment of Sir Thomas. But this did not gall him, for he felt more at home in the old-fashioned room than he had felt at home anywhere since he had left the little closet that he used to proudly term his "study" in the Kent rectory, where he had worked so hard over his books and dreamed so high, leaning on his elbows on the sill and gazing up at the great stars over the marshes.

His valise had been placed by the handsome four-poster bed which was draped with curtains and coverlets of Jacobean needlework—fox-red acorns and faded green oak leaves on a ground of coarse white twill. He opened this at once and for the sake of company took out his mirror. With an odd, superstitious thrill he felt through the goat-skin case, wondering if at last it had been broken in his journey, and then, though he had vowed not to look into it for a long while, he must glance at it to see if it were cracked. The dim smooth surface was unblemished, and he slipped it back in the case and stood it against the wall on the table which was covered with costly, but worn, velvet and fringe.

There was another mirror in the room, of about the same date, as he supposed, as his own modest travelling glass, which had belonged, he knew, to his grandfather. This hung above the low, open hearth and had the utmost width of a looking-glass, that is, the stretch of the workman's arm as

he rolls the surface. It was surrounded by a heavy wreath of fruit and flowers in gilded wood, entwined in and out of staring yet eyeless masks. The whole was worn and soiled, the tarnish had spread even over the surface of the mirror, making the reflection blurred, greenish, and flecked with black.

It was so hung that it reflected the entire room, and Mr. Darrell looked at it with a touch of that delicious expectancy that came upon him with such odd suddenness and which was often a prelude to what he tremblingly named his "veil'd delight." But the mirror reflected nothing but the room and himself standing there in his new, plain travelling suit, his dark hair in a horn buckle, his plain cravat folded carefully.

"Why should she appear here, or anywhere? I must not be tempted by dreams, yet it is agreeable to have a place in which it is possible to dream."

He unpacked his few belongings. Even if he decided after all not to accept the post as tutor to Sir Thomas Brodie's boy, he would not make himself ridiculous by leaving immediately.

As he put out his scanty toilet appointments and his few books he glanced continually and with pleasure at the noble prospect from either of the two windows—sloping golden parkland and the hills beyond, and the wide stretch of sky that seemed to symbolise a limitless freedom.

If there were a rainbow here, why, one would see the whole arc!

He hummed to himself "Who is at my window, who?" as he went downstairs by the appointed hour marked on the gilt bracket clock in the corner, to interview Sir Thomas. He smiled at his

own caprice, for the lodgings they had given him much reconciled him to the household, disagreeable in itself, in which he would be probably expected to take an uncomfortable, perhaps an odious part. Yes, he was soothed by the old, despised room they had allotted him. It was so silent, so far from the public chambers—he had traversed many corridors and ante-chambers to reach it—and the very atmosphere seemed to have been long undisturbed by any human being.

He liked the heavy, sunken floor richly polished; he liked the tarnished mirror, which he believed had reflected many happy scenes in its murky depths before it had been blotched by age. He liked the little sunken door by the fireplace, a curious position, and probably that of a cupboard—it had not yielded when he had tried the elaborate metal handle. There was something, he thought, happy and beautiful about the spacious chamber, and with a leap of his heart and a thrill of his senses as if he considered and gloated over a precious hidden treasure, the young man dwelt on his dear possession—the mirror in the goatskin case which he had set on the fringed, velvet-covered table.

Sir Thomas Brodie interviewed the new tutor in his private room, which was entirely filled with cabinets and drawers of medals and shelves on which were neatly-bound catalogues.

Mr. Darrell eyed swiftly the man who represented to him a formidable entity—his employer—and found the baronet to be no impressive personality. He was about seventy years of age, of a flabby, slack habit of body, dressed in expensive clothes carelessly adjusted, his loose-featured

face injected and stained by the acid of ill-health, the small eyes almost concealed by folds of unwholesome flesh. His periwig was thrown down on the bureau, which was littered with papers and medals in their cases, and his greasy grey hairs were partially concealed by a knotted handkerchief.

His manner was fretful and impatient; no doubt he had been upset by the unusual events of the day. But the new tutor, who had had considerable experience of men, at once judged him as of little account beyond what power his wealth might give him.

"Here surely is one whose mind is as narrow as his heart is weak. He may not himself be capable of evil intentions, nay, he may even be good-natured, but he can resist no one and nothing, and would give all for his ease."

While Mr. Darrell was thus silently judging the man before whom he so respectfully stood, the baronet was muttering over the new tutor's credentials. Then, with an air of dis-ease and even of embarrassment, he began to talk of his three children. Of all of them he used the word "difficult," and Mr. Darrell smiled to himself. The boy was "delicate, but difficult," Miss Flora was "brilliant, but difficult," Miss Harriet was "docile, but difficult." He glanced at the postponed marriage—a question of health, of megrims, of nerves—and then he paused, as if expecting the tutor to say something. So Mr. Darrell put in smoothly:

"This lady is so soon to be married she will scarcely require my services, I think."

"It is true," replied the baronet pompously,

yet still with that air of uneasiness, "that she has had a liberal education—Madame Duchène is a very accomplished woman. But until she is married I should wish you to read with her, and to supervise her painting and her music."

Mr. Darrell hardly thought it worth while to mention that he did not possess these accomplishments himself, and merely remarked:

"I suppose that your elder daughter, sir, Miss Flora, is also beyond my province, and it will be only the boy, Master Harry, whose studies I am to regulate?"

The old man replied testily:

"No, no. Flora requires someone to read with her; she is very eager in her reading. Flora is quite a remarkable young woman. She is," he sought for a word, then used that he had applied before to his elder daughter, "she is brilliant, yes, brilliant. She is the mistress here, she rules all—and quite capable, too. You must go to her," he repeated, "for everything."

Mr. Darrell inclined his head slightly as the old man continued in a nervous fashion to ramble on—little hints and sketches of himself and his past life, of his travels and his London gaieties, his happy speculations and investments—his father had been paymaster-general to the Forces, and he had done something the same kind of business himself. Then, with age coming on and the death of his third lady, he had thought of his estates and retirement—the boy was delicate and required the country air. . . .

Mr. Darrell scarcely listened. He thought how stupid and trivial it all was, and he remembered his own war service, the poignant reality out of

which this man and his kind had made the huge sums of money that they spent so grossly and carelessly.

His aversion from the establishment increased, he scarcely concealed his coldness which must have shown in his face, he felt, because after a while he sensed that the old man was making concessions, almost pleading with him to remain—he was evidently used to tutors who soon wearied of their odd duties with a termagant and a hysterical girl and a delicate boy. He heard himself say: “I’ll do what I can, Sir Thomas; I shall remain as long as I can. But this is not a position such as I have ever held before, nor one that I greatly like.”

The baronet struck a silver bell that stood among the half-unpacked medals on his bureau.

“Mr. Moffatt, my chaplain, will take you to see Harry and his sisters. You must judge for yourself. I hope you will remain—someone like yourself is essential to my”—he sought for a phrase—“my peace of mind. I have to relegate certain of my duties. I am an old man, sir, to be the father of such young creatures.” His broken teeth pulled at his loose lower lip. “I’ll make it worth your while—if there are little inconveniences to endure you’ll find also that there are compensations.”

Mr. Darrell bowed again, not committing himself. He thought of the room in which they had housed him and the mirror in its goatskin case, as a man thinks of a refuge. He longed for the night to come that he might be alone.

The chaplain entered with an air of fussy and overwhelming good-humour. In the charge of

this person, who roused his instant antipathy, Mr. Darrell left the presence of Sir Thomas. He had the feeling that the baronet had forgotten his very existence a second after he had left the room.

As they passed through several empty apartments which had been newly and handsomely decorated, the tutor had leisure to observe his companion—a servile, greasy, ignorant, and vulgar individual, who began, with instant good-humour, to take him into his confidence.

“ I’m to show you your three pupils. I’ll give you a hint or two first. Miss Flora is rude and haughty and as ill-bred as a ploughboy, and Miss Harriet is sullen and queer. The boy is pampered and ailing and of not much account here ”—he tapped his own forehead, with a smile on his thick lips. “ Madame—that’s the governess—is a bit of a devil, but easy enough at times. As for Sir Thomas, you’ve seen him yourself. For those who can put up with a thing or two and have a supple back and a ready tongue, there’s a comfortable living to be picked up.”

“ Why, I dare say, sir, but it seems a fantastic sort of life to me.”

“ It depends on what you’ve been used to,” replied the chaplain comfortably. “ I’ve held worse places. I believe you arrived just as the bride was leaving the house to-day? You saw, perhaps, that pretty little scene—she would not go through with it. Well, perhaps the gentleman will not offer again—she is not likely to have many suitors, poor thing.”

“ Why did she go so far and then refuse?” asked Mr. Darrell curiously. “ She’s so young,” he added, half to himself.

"Well," said Mr. Moffatt with a sly, humorous look, "she's none too happy with her sister, who'd have her out of the way. Mr. Steele is very fond of her, there's no doubt of that, and she seems fond of him. Here they are, sir, this is the door to their apartments."

The stout clergyman paused before a door, formidable in height, surmounted with splendid carvings. With his hand on the knob the chaplain paused and looked at the new tutor with a leer and a chuckle, good-natured enough but too understanding for Mr. Darrell's liking. Perceiving the other's unspoken thoughts, he said swiftly:

"You're thinking that I'm not suited for this post. You don't suppose that I shall stay. Well, perhaps I don't either."

"I know very little about you, sir," evaded the chaplain, with a deepening of his grin; "you seem a likely enough young fellow."

"Open the door and let me see my pupils."

The chaplain obeyed; he seemed to cringe instinctively at the touch of authority.

The two men entered a large room fully lit by the afternoon sun. There were four people on a couch by the window, and the new tutor looked at them in eager expectation, with the desire to satisfy what he felt was more than a common and casual curiosity. He had an instant sense, teasing, and yet not wholly distasteful, that he had lived through this moment before. It seemed at once strange and familiar, fanciful and intensely real, like an oft-repeated dream at last materialised, a scene out of the depths of the mind's secret and inner contemplation projected into everyday clarity.

Yet there was nothing remarkable about any of the people grouped on the long, stiff sofa of red velvet with the thick fringe and gilt nails.

One was the girl whom he had seen seated on the terrace steps with her hands clasped in her lap, shaking her head, and refusing to cross the path to the chapel where her bridegroom awaited her coming.

She was turning over a book and did not look up as he entered. Beside her was a boy, who, with an air of lassitude, leaned on her shoulder and, murmuring some rhyme to himself, appeared to be absorbed in a length of string he was twisting in and out of his hands. In features and shape he much resembled his sister and there was something, the new tutor thought, touching in this likeness between these two frail and forlorn-seeming creatures.

The boy, who seemed as indifferent as his sister as to what was passing round him, took no notice of the entry of the two men. Mr Darrell thought: "They are used to people coming in on them suddenly. They have no privacy save in their own minds."

Then, while he was looking at these two, he became aware that the other occupants of the couch were regarding him with a keen and haughty scrutiny. One of these was a girl, whom he at once recognised as the elder sister, of whose character and disposition he had been twice warned—once by his employer, and once by the meek little librarian. A glance at Flora Brodie was sufficient to explain why her father had, twice, and deliberately, applied to her the adjective "brilliant." She might not be, on close and critical inspection, a beauty, but she would pass

very well for one in any company and for a considerable time.

Her features were irregular, but her colouring was exceptionally fresh and vivid. There was a brightness in the closely-curling brown hair, a lustre in the large grey eyes, a bloom on the smooth cheeks, and on the full lip, that had at a first glance the dazzling effect given by a large, intensely coloured flower, not perfect, perhaps, in detail, but exquisite in hue and sheen.

She was not tall above the ordinary, nor did she possess any particular grace or charm of shape or carriage. Yet she had an air of dignity, almost of majesty, rare in one of her age. Her whole aspect conveyed intelligence, vitality, an eager, perhaps cruel, interest in all that was taking place about her.

Like her sister she wore informal undress, loose and careless. A spaniel was on her knee, and she caressed it with quick, almost nervous, gestures.

The fourth person was an elderly French woman, broad-bosomed, with faded brown eyes and a dark down on her upper lip. With almost incredible speed she was twisting knots in a long white cord.

The chaplain made the presentation of the new tutor in a slipshod yet deferential fashion. He seemed uncertain of his reception, ready to be familiar in a jovial fashion, or deeply respectful, as Miss Flora, whom he clearly regarded as the most important person present, should indicate.

"The new tutor," said Flora with an air of careless indifference, which was belied by the steady eagerness in her eyes. "Harry, here is your master. Harriet, put down your book and

look up—if you are not, after all, to be married, you, too, must have lessons.”

She spoke without courtesy and Mr. Darrell disliked her voice.

“ I thought that you also were to be one of my pupils, Miss Flora ? ” he remarked.

She replied instantly, with a certain keenness as if she took up a challenge.

“ If I choose I shall read with you—that is, if you know enough. Mr. Bradley, the last tutor, knew nothing, was dull and impertinent as well.”

Madame Duchène laughed, a little fat, flattering laugh, as if her dear young lady had said something important or witty. The chaplain made a little ducking cringe and rubbed his hands together as if highly amused.

Mr. Darrell, who had not been invited to sit down, remained standing, and looked at the brother and sister at the end of the couch who, despite their sister's commands, had, after a disinterested glance at the newcomer, returned to their separate occupations.

Irritated by this, Miss Flora rose; her swiftness and air of animation was remarkable. Mr. Darrell was as conscious of her presence as if she had stood quite close to him and touched him.

“ I hope,” she said in a raised tone, “ that you will not weary me like Mr. Bradley did.”

He replied, as if he spoke to a spoiled child:

“ I think if you are an attentive pupil you will not be wearied, Miss Flora.”

The governess threw up her fat hands:

“ Sir, you must be a brilliant scholar to equal Miss Flora ! ”

Mr. Darrell bowed, while a cynical smile

played for a second round the lean mouth of the chaplain.

"I shall be interested to test the powers of such an accomplished young lady."

"Oh, indeed! You seem very cool and sure of yourself, sir. I don't think you will find your position so easy. Harry knows nothing at all, and Harriet is very tiresome. What is your name?" she demanded.

He told her, and she began to laugh.

"Henry, Harriet, and Harry!"

The boy looked up at that.

"Is your name Harry too?"

But Miss Flora silenced this curiosity with a sharp frown, and returned to her questioning of the tutor, whom she kept standing before the others as if he were a servant whom she was about to consider engaging. She wanted to know his credentials, his past life, his travelling, his friends.

He answered formally and briefly, telling her just what he chose she should know. When he mentioned the war she exclaimed in surprise:

"What! a soldier! You don't look it, and you have no sword."

"It would not be very suitable to my present position."

"But all gentlemen wear swords," she insisted.

"It is a distinction that I must forego."

Miss Flora glanced at her governess with a lift of her lip which gave a very unpleasant expression to her face. Mr. Darrell thought that this glance meant "You see how difficult he is, but you shall see me break him." But he hardly took

any heed of her, his answers to her impertinent questions had been almost mechanical. He had been looking at the pale girl in the corner of the couch, who continued to turn over the pages of her large book.

"What is in my mind?" he asked himself. There was a strain and a confusion over his senses; he was provoked and baffled by something only half remembered, by something only partly forgotten. Why did she not look up? If he could once see into her eyes all might be made clear. The boy by her side had taken a pencil from his pocket and was drawing something on the margin of the book, and Mr. Darrell felt an odd curiosity to see what this was, but the imperious voice of Miss Flora kept him where he stood.

She had, with no great subtlety, changed her tactics, and with cold graciousness informed him:

"You will dine at our table, with me, Madame Duchène, my brother and sister."

A sly look of amazement showed behind the Frenchwoman's servility as she nodded her consent, and Mr. Moffatt permitted himself a fantastic bow.

"Mr. Darrell was to dine with us, Miss Flora," he smiled; "you'll not make this cruel distinction?"

"The distinction is already made," replied the young lady rudely. "You stay where you belong, sir, with Mr. Bonthron and Dr. Hay, but Mr. Darrell will dine with us—his dear, interesting, obedient pupils."

The new tutor thought this so stupid that he doubted if she had the capacity for command that

she imagined she possessed. He told her that Sir Thomas had made a different arrangement—he was to take his meals and pass his leisure with those members of the establishment who were considered of his own rank—the chaplain, the doctor, the librarian, something between the servants and the gentlefolk.

“So you see, Miss Flora, your father has already decided that I may not dine with you.”

At this opposition she became passionate. Her quick, brilliant eyes fixed on him with a look of temper.

“Do you suppose,” she said, “I heed what my father says?”

“I was warned that you were headstrong,” replied Mr. Darrell, “and that you do not indeed take any heed of what your father says. But if you are to be my pupil and to learn anything from me, you must take some heed of what I say.”

“You hear that?” cried the girl, swinging round on her governess. “He gives commands.”

“It is amusing,” said the old Frenchwoman with a non-committal smile.

Miss Flora began to walk up and down the long bright room with an appearance of great animation and energy.

“Do you think you can make me obey?” she asked. “Do you really think so?”

“Is the matter so important that you should make that demand in so high a tone?” the new tutor smiled. “Clearly, if I am engaged to read with you and study with you, it is my duty to endeavour to force your obedience.”

While he spoke he obeyed an irresistible impulse and, crossing behind the brother and

sister on the end of the sofa, looked at what the boy was drawing on the margin of the book. He found this to be three "H's" interlaced one above the other, and delicately adorned with a fine scrollwork which grew quickly under the lad's pencil.

"You see," said the boy, who seemed pleased with his effort, "three 'H's'--Harriet, Henry, and Harry."

CHAPTER V

MISS FLORA had her way, as she had known she would—he dined at the table with the women and the boy. This concession was not a courtesy, of course, he decided, but a subtle form of childish torment. Instead of being allowed the company of those in the same condition as himself he was to be subject to all the vexatious humiliations the malicious young woman could devise when he was in her power, or, as she thought in her power. In reality, the new tutor was indifferent to her idle malice and glad of the opportunity to observe closer the brother and sister who inspired in him such a poignant uneasy interest.

He had never expected to be comfortable in Criffel Hall; he had arrived there armed against insolence, prepared even for persecution, so he made little of the chaplain's sly congratulations, and the librarian's mild wonder.

"The young madam has taken a fancy to you," grinned Mr. Moffatt, "you'll be on rose leaves, since she rules everything. But there'll be difficulties too. You must flatter—and yet, I don't know, it seems that you have been successful without flattering."

"I am here," replied the new tutor, "for only a little while as I hope, to earn my bread and the caprices and tempers of my employers concern me only a little."

The old librarian put in:

"I am sorry for that. I hoped perhaps you could have done something for Miss Harriet."

"How?" asked Mr. Darrell, and as neither of the men immediately answered him, he added: "How could I do anything for that strange girl since you who have known her so long were not able to be of any service to her?"

Mr. Bonthron replied rather uneasily:

"Oh, I don't know. Sometimes a stranger sees things, can do things." Venturing on boldness, he added: "Her sister torments her, that's plain enough. You see, Miss Flora is a great heiress—her mother had a large fortune and it is all settled on her; she is to enjoy it when she is five-and-twenty—that makes her independent."

"I wonder," said Mr. Darrell, "that she cares to spend her youth in so desolate a place as this."

"Oh, she's mixed with the great world," put in the chaplain. "She has been to London and abroad with an aunt and cousin, but somehow it was never quite a success. There were adventures, you understand, little harmless, silly, girlish adventures."

"They are no concern of mine," said Mr. Darrell. "She's a beauty, no doubt, a brilliant beauty——"

Mr. Moffatt caught him up.

"Oh, you think that she's a beauty, do you? Well, I suppose she saw that; perhaps that's why she took a liking to you, though you were so brusque with her."

"Was I?" mused the new tutor. "Was I brusque with her, and did she take a fancy to me?"

In the pleasant chamber that they had given him he looked at himself in the dark, specked

mirror above the mantelpiece, and he wondered what there was in those lean features, in that carelessly dressed dark hair, in those tired eyes, to take any woman's fancy. The word "fancy" galled him, flicked at his pride.

He had been prepared for humiliation when he had accepted this post of an underling, but he had not been ready to be the object of a silly woman's caprice—fancy, caprice, it could be no more. And yet the worst of the smart was that he was flattered by her notice.

She was, without doubt, the most highly placed and the most remarkable of all the women who had come this way. Any man would think she was a prize despite her childish tempers and her cold manners which might, after all, for all he could tell, be brushed aside as he brushed aside a film of dust from his wide window pane to look upon the noble prospect shimmering in golden light beyond and below.

Dark clouds that had a hard look and were ragged at the edge were rising in those remote spaces beyond the hills, now violet-brown in colour, that limited the horizon.

Mr. Darrell thought of the storm, that light and airy storm which had passed over the city when he had been considering whether or no he should come to Criffel Hall, when he had stood at the window above the sordid noisy streets with the letter in his hand and when he had sat before the mirror and seen the rainbow in its depths.

And as he thought of the rainbow he thought of Harry Brodie and the young girl with the closed, still face. She was like that. He smiled to himself at the whimsicality of the comparison. Of course, she was not like that, but a flesh and blood

human creature, no doubt full of faults, stupid, obstinate, perhaps dull. But the first impression had been of something impalpable and transient, the shadow of a flower in a pane of glass, the reflection of a lily in water, a star hidden behind deep veils of cloud.

He came back to his first comparison—a rainbow in a mirror.

CHAPTER VI

THE new tutor's first meal at Criffel Hall brought disappointment. Neither Harriet nor her brother was present; the boy went to bed before this hour, he was told, and the girl had a sick headache. He had to face alone the railleries of Miss Flora and the bad manners of the governess that alternated between hostility and indifference.

They dined in a lofty room; the furniture was costly and formal, the walls were pale. The stiff brocaded curtains were not drawn and the last twilight filled the room with a silver gloom that was only faintly scattered by the candles in the crystal chandelier that hung high over the heads of the three people at the dining-table.

Flora Brodie had taken no pains to adorn herself; she wore the careless dress in which he had first seen her, but he sensed an increase of her radiance that was like a star that burned with a more intense light because of the darkening of the sky. In the thin, crossing shadows she seemed indeed to shine.

The setting sun broke the clouds and the beams through the open window struck fire from the crystal dangling beneath the candles and cast a tracery of light into the girl's richly-curling hair and gave an edging of light to her features.

Her brilliant colouring, thus seen to such singular advantage, reminded Mr. Darrell of his

Kentish honeysuckle—coral pink, honey gold, cream like the heart of a rose.

Her smooth fingers were playing with a peach; she looked at him with a challenge that he returned.

"I am sorry, Miss Flora, that your sister is not here to-night."

"Oh, I wonder why you should be sorry?"

"For courtesy," he said, inclining his head.

"For courtesy!" she echoed. She gave that meaning look, that he much disliked, to the governess. "For your own sake, you should be glad—Harriet is very dull company, is she not, Madame Duchène?"

"Miss Harriet," remarked the Frenchwoman with casual severity, "is a very naughty girl, and a very sullen stupid girl, and sometimes I think all is not quite right with her poor intellects. It is a great pity, is it not, mademoiselle, that she is not married and well out of the way?"

"Nobody should have taken any notice of her," said Flora impatiently. "She should have just been picked up and carried to the chapel. It was only a mood, and it should not have been indulged—everyone knows she is very fond of Daniel and, of course, she would be happier with him than she is here."

She rose up suddenly as she finished speaking and smiled, pleased, as if Mr. Darrell had risen to his feet more through a command than from formal civility.

"What can you do?" she asked. "Can you run fast and ride well, catch a horse, saddle it, and swim? Did you like being a soldier? Are you clever with your sword and your pistol?"

"I've never felt any handicap," he replied.

"except lack of money. But then, I've never been ambitious."

"Come outside," said Flora. "How I hate this house! Another evening with nothing to do!"

The governess made a grimace, shrugged up her shoulders, pulled down her lips, and began to sip her coffee. Flora moved into the sunbeams and opened the tall window on to the terrace.

Mr. Darrell followed her and was grateful for the cool air that blew on his face. The rim of the sun disappeared behind the distant clouds that edged the horizon, the sky became cold with a sparkle like pale sapphire.

"How dreary it is," said the girl impatiently.

"Why do you remain here? You are, surely, one of those fortunate ladies who can please herself?"

"Oh, I've been away, and I shall go away again. But I always come back. I am waiting, you see, until I have my own fortune. I am extravagant, I spend too much, and my affairs get entangled in other ways too." She looked at him defiantly. "I met a man like you in Rome, and he too pretended that he disliked me."

"I don't pretend, Miss Flora. I've only known you for a few hours."

"As if that wasn't long enough," she interrupted scornfully.

"I am in your father's service," he reminded her gravely.

"Bah! that is all nonsense too. You know that you go or stay as I choose." Without giving him time to protest or acquiesce, she added swiftly: "Come to the fountain."

Through the cold, fast-deepening dusk he followed her. The fountain was of lead and seemed

older than the house. It was set between narrow walks edged by box hedges; in the centre of the basin the almost shapeless form of a fish cast the jet of water high in the air.

"There used to be lilies here," said Flora, "but they withered, and no one replaced them."

She moved her fingers in the water that was shaken by the cascade of the fountain, and drew up wet trails of brown leaves. For a second the drops of water sliding from her wrist were like a silver bracelet, then the bewildering glimmer of light seemed to fade completely and Mr. Darrell saw the unfamiliar place and the strange woman as blurred as he had seen his own face when he had looked at it in the green and black tarnished, speckled mirror above the mantelpiece in the chamber they had given him.

He thought that she had brought him there out of idle coquetry and he could not find it in himself to respond, even out of civility or to pass a heavy half-hour. He was too weary and his mood too dull. The massive murk of the spreading cloud was dense overhead, encroaching on the pallid blue in which one star hung.

The young man stood awkwardly, listening to the splash of the fountain, which seemed to soothe him into a stupid lethargy.

Flora Brodie, who could just see this through the twilight, seated herself on the curling lip of the basin, and what she said surprised him completely.

"Please listen to me. If you are to remain here, and I hope you do remain here, you must understand something of my position. You asked just now why I was here; indeed, I have every

chance to leave this place which I detest, but I have my duty——”

She paused on that word, which to him was an astonishing one from her lips. She seemed to sense his surprise, though she could not discern his face, and she laughed impatiently.

“Yes, indeed, my half-sister—you have seen something of her waywardness. Well, there is an explanation—she is not settled in her wits; indeed, she is almost an idiot.”

Mr. Darrell gave a harsh exclamation at this terrible word.

“You must know,” Flora hurried on, “we need never talk of it, but it must be clear. The boy, too—their mother was insane—my father married her for her pretty face and gentle ways, but she—if we had not had so much money she would have been in a madhouse. She had to be put away as it was in rooms of her own where no one went but her attendants. I can remember it quite well; it was not an agreeable childhood for me.”

“Poor creature!” said Mr. Darrell harshly.

“Which of us do you mean?” asked Flora. He saw her faint shape bend towards him from the fountain rim. “Which of us are you sorry for?”

“For all of you. It is an ugly story.”

“You wish you had not come? You will go again, I suppose, quite soon. Everybody does, as soon as they know. Why *did* you come?” The question was like a command.

He told her without disguise.

“Because of my necessity and desperate position—poverty, idleness.”

“I see you have your troubles too. It might

be, then, worth your while to stay." She spoke coldly with a practical air and rose from the fountain. "If poor Harry should take a liking to you you could do anything with him. In other ways, too, you might be a great help to me. And I"—she added in an impersonal tone that took all offence from her words—"would pay you very handsomely."

"It is true, Miss Flora, this is not an occupation I would choose, but then, I am in no position to choose my occupation. Yet is it not with your father that I should discuss these things?"

"My father!" she said bitterly. "You have seen him? He is old, ill, a drunkard. His reason for being here is that he is no longer fitted for the company of any save those whom he pays to endure him."

"You speak very frankly, Miss Flora."

"What is the use of subterfuge—you would see all these things for yourself. You would be told them by Mr. Moffatt, by Mr. Bonthron, or the servants."

He had to admit to himself that this was true and to confess that he ought to admire a candour which had seemed at first brutal.

"They have told you, I dare say, that I am mistress here? I have to be; there is no one else to take charge. I do not do very well, I know that we are cheated and laughed at and despised, that there is waste, disorder. My father thinks of nothing but his medals, he is only happy when he is arranging or re-arranging them or cataloguing them, or gloating over them. Mr. Bonthron and he and an assistant they have spend days at that work—I can get no attention for anything important. The steward does what he pleases, we do

not get what we should from the land. There is no one to check Harry or to control his sister."

She paused in her speech and moved closer to him, so that he could faintly see the outline of her disturbed and brilliant face.

"Oh, yes, this is a miserable life," she added. "We squander money and we squander time. When my father dies I shall know what to do; as it is, I go on from week to week with no heart in anything."

"Your sister was to have been married to-day," said Mr. Darrell, with the air of one who tries to fit a puzzle together.

"Yes, Daniel is fond of her. He is full of romantic and sentimental ideas, he feels he could make her happy." Flora spoke without a sneer, but her voice was disagreeable. "He doesn't expect much, only a doll to sit in his parlour. Don't you think she should marry him, don't you think that's the best thing she could do?"

"How can I tell?" Mr. Darrell's compassion was suddenly quenched in a dislike of these confidences, in almost a repulsion from the woman who made them. "It is becoming cold and dark, I ought not to keep you here."

He made his way towards the house and she followed him. Though he walked quickly, she was soon by his side, and he felt rather than saw that she had straightened her figure and held her head high; when she spoke her voice was incisive.

"You do not need to say anything about what I have told you, of course."

"To whom should I speak?" replied the young man. "I am not likely to gossip with any of your father's dependents."

On the terrace he lost her; for a second he could

hear the tap of her high-heeled shoes, then there was neither sound or sight of her in the dusk. She must have gone round by a side entrance, door, or window; he had to fumble his way in alone to the room where they had dined and where now the glittering, swaying crystals of the chandelier made a gentle brightness in the darkened room.

Madame Duchène had gone, and there was something disagreeable to Mr. Darrell in the sight of the disordered table, the stained glasses, the soiled lace cloth, the fruit-parings and nutshells. He was in a mood to be affected by trifles.

As he stood there alone, and not knowing what to do in the alien place, he had the same sense of forlorn remoteness as he had experienced in his dingy London lodgings. The large, opulent house built with such cost, which consumed so much money in its maintenance, was to him as dreary and repellent as the poor, neglected residence in the miserable back street.

He opened the door and listened; he moved about the corridors and stairs. Here and there were lights, here and there the sound of voices—some manner of life was going on. No doubt the master of the establishment was closeted with his weary assistants, turning over his medals stamped with the images of dead Cæsars and the symbols of vanished glories, conquests and festivals. In some closet or private room the librarian, the chaplain, and the doctor would be amusing themselves with drink or cards or reading, or yawning over a fire as their mood or dispositions would be. Below there would be a number of idle servants gossiping with evil tongues over the broken wedding and the arrival of the new tutor.

But where was Flora and Madame Duchène? Were they locked away safely in some rich bed-chamber laughing over him, his dryness, his pretensions to dignity, perhaps making a mock of his lean face and untidy locks, of his hired hack, his poor baggage and swordless condition?

And the boy and girl—the children of the drunkard and the imbecile, so piteous in their ghastly affliction—where were they? He thought of them with great uneasiness. He had no reason to disbelieve what Flora Brodie had said, she had no object in telling him lies or in any way misleading him, yet he utterly mistrusted everything that she had related.

Taking a taper from the sideboard, he tried to find his way to his room in the east wing, but soon was lost in a confusion of passages, for the smooth, arrogant façade of the house, so precise and modern, was but a sham. The place had been rebuilt and added to often during the last century, and was clumsily patched and joined by little galleries and staircases that led from one level to another.

A chance meeting with a servant put an end to his tedious wanderings. She conducted him to his room, which he found was not, after all, far from the main apartments, and he entered the pleasant, gracious chamber with a sense of relief and release. The sky was inky blue beyond the two uncurtained windows.

The maidservant offered Mr. Darrell a fire. She said it was long since the room had been slept in, and that the air was chilly and stale. But he was not inclined to endure this interruption. And yet, he asked himself as the woman closed the door on

him, interruption of what? Despite his weariness he did not desire to sleep.

There were a number of candles in the room; he lit several of them, placing them on the bureau, on the table by the bed, on the shelf above the bracket clock. Then he cast himself into the deep chair with arms by the empty hearth, and sat there relaxed, still, as if listening to the silence. He had a strong impulse to rise and pull the goatskin cover off his mirror and gaze into its depths, but he resisted this desire and remained motionless, so sunk in inner contemplation that the room became dim and blurred about him as the fountain and the garden had been when Flora Brodie had spoken to him. His soul was agitated almost to a point of anguish, and he knew by what. Not by what Flora Brodie had told him, surely? Not by this commonplace tale of the libertine, the drunkard, the imbecile, the spendthrift, heartlessly related by an arrogant woman?

What were these strangers to him? His unformed distress seemed to stretch beyond time and space. Why had he come here, why had he always been so restless? He need not have gone to the war; after his fine, satisfactory career at the college he could have found a post. He could have married in the ordinary way, and by now have been settled comfortably in life. Why had he not, during the war, have taken some chance of promotion, or fortune, or adventure as other men had taken them?

Why had he not indeed died, as other men had, quickly and easily? He had been preserved, unscathed, for nothing.

He became drowsy and would have slept had he not been roused by a gentle tapping at the

window. He rose with an effort and took a step across the shining, massive, sloping boards.

"Who is at my windo, who? No one, of course."

The candlelight, gleaming queerly in the thick pane, showed the withered tendrils of a creeper that the night breeze sent uneasily against the glass. Holding the candle aloft, the young man glanced between the curtains of the fourposter at the bed with high, soft mattress and high, soft pillows and handsome coverlet. Comfortable, luxurious, a finer bed than he had slept in for many a day; finer, no doubt, than any bed he had ever slept in before. But not for him, or not to-night.

He returned to his chair. He noted curiously that it was covered with red, rubbed, yellow velvet, and garnished with a thick but faded red silk fringe. On the back was a coat-of-arms which had been embroidered in silken cords that now were broken and hung in loops.

Restless, unsuccessful, what was the matter with him? Still holding the candle high, he looked yet again at his face in the mirror above the mantelpiece. To-morrow he would move it, or, if it were too heavy, cover it up—he did not care to so often see his own reflection. Was he weak as well as disappointed? Well, other people had their misfortunes too; no one in this house, whatever their position, or money, or opportunity, could be termed happy.

He took the buckle out of his hair and loosened his cravat, then seated himself again in the warm, worn easy-chair. He wished that he had drawn the thick curtains across the window, but he was too tired to rise again. The tapping of the withered

spray on the window pane was pleasant; the sky was jet black and frayed now and then by light flashes of summer lightning.

Mr. Darrell turned his heavy head towards the corner where his mirror stood in the goatskin case. He wondered if the lightning, like the rainbow, would be reflected in the mirror, but he did not make the experiment. And presently, and against his will, he slept.

CHAPTER VII

MR. DARRELL woke, as was his custom, suddenly, and at once. He was used to opening his eyes on strange places, and recollected instantly where he was and his circumstances. He could not have slept long, the candles were still burning, though low and flickering in the sockets of the sticks.

He stretched and yawned and thought with distaste of the hours of night yet to be put through, then he became aware what had aroused him—a tapping, not on the window now but on the door. This was very timid and hesitant, and somehow sad, and Mr. Darrell's inexplicable sense of expectancy, so quickly evoked at anything strange, flamed in his heart as he said:

“Come in! Come in! I am awake.”

But his voice was lower than he had meant it to be and the door was thick, and he knew that he had not been heard, for the little faint, persistent knocking continued. He picked up one of the candles that was flaring round the long, unsnuffed wick, went to the door, and opened it.

What he beheld on the threshold was so unexpected and yet fitted in so precisely with his broken dreams and slumbers and his uneasy waking moods, that he stood dumb and motionless with shock.

It was cold and still and dark in the passage, and a young creature stood there in a white shift, like one prepared for the grave, pale in face and

hair, looking upward and holding carefully, almost tenderly, a sword in a velvet scabbard from which depended great tassels of gold and silk.

"Harriet!" said Mr. Darrell, and did not know that he had spoken.

The visitor shook a frail head.

"No. May I please come in, sir, and I will tell you why I am here."

The voice broke an incredible second that had been like a spell of sorcery to Mr. Darrell. He sighed and lowered his candle. It was the boy, of course; how could he have mistaken them? She was very like her brother, but half a head taller. Was the child ill, or sleep-walking, or frightened?

"Come in, Harry, come in! You must not stand there in the cold. It is true that I have not a fire—— Why did you not put some bed-gown on? What is it, how can I help you?"

He spoke rapidly to cover his own confusion and in an endeavour to clear his own mind as he drew the child over the threshold. He was stung with an angry pity when he felt the thin bony shoulders, the narrow chest, through the cambric gown, when he saw the hollows at the base of the slender neck and in the sweep of the cheeks where all should have been so rounded and full.

"I did not put anything on," said the boy in a confidential whisper, "because I did not wish to disturb anyone. I lay awake till I thought all was quiet and safe—it is not really very cold, and I did not think you would have a fire."

But he shivered as he spoke, and when he had finished these brave words his teeth chattered. Mr. Darrell glanced helplessly round the room; such garments as he possessed he had not unpacked.

He lifted the boy up and sat him within the warm woollen curtains of the bed.

"What did you want with me, Harry? This is a strange way for us to make each other's acquaintance. I did not think that you had noticed me even."

"Oh, yes, when I was on the sofa with Harriet, I was listening to all you said. And to what Flora said too. I was sorry you had not got a sword—see, I have brought you one." With the simple, deliberate gestures of childhood, and an earnest look, the boy laid the weapon in the man's hand. "It is mine; my father gave it me some while ago. It is too big and heavy for me to wear. I should look silly with it, should I not?"

Mr. Darrell searched back in his mind for Flora's words about his lack of a sword. He had forgotten them; he would never have remembered them again if it had not been for this. Much moved, he said:

"I did not think you were concerned in me at all, Harry. I have come to teach you lessons, you know. I thought you would dislike me for that."

"I don't mind lessons much," said the boy. "Of course, I'm not very good and I get fearful headaches——" his face, that had been earnest and keen, fell a little. "Harriet helps me—we don't do so badly, and I thought you wouldn't be severe."

"Why did you think that?" said Mr. Darrell, standing awkwardly before the boy wrapped in the folds of the thick curtains and holding the sword in both hands.

"Oh, I don't know. Harriet and I thought we would like you to stay, but we were afraid when Flora began to speak to you that we wouldn't."

"I don't think she meant to be unkind, Harry."

With a little quick movement the boy hunched up his bony feet on the bed and clasped his thin hands round his knees. Despite his appearance of extreme ill-health, despite his mean, undersized body, there was an almost unearthly beauty in his small, wistful face. Although at first it appeared insignificant, Mr. Darrell now noticed the exquisite delicacy of the features, the lustre of the large eyes, the lovely greenish-gold hue of the thick, soft hair.

He had pretty ways, too; his speech and his smile were alike charming.

"Do you like the sword?" he asked anxiously.

"Yes, indeed, but it is too fine for me to wear every day."

"But I want you to wear it—Harriet and I both want you to wear it."

Mr. Darrell sat down on the soft bed beside the boy and put his arm round him.

"You are getting cold, Harry, and it is very late. See, it is three of the clock—you should not have lain awake so long thinking of me. Come, I am very pleased, but you must get back to bed."

"You'll wear the sword?" the child insisted.

"If it pleases you—yes. But your sister, Miss Flora, she will recognise it, perhaps that will make her angry?"

"Oh, no," said the boy, "she never remembers anything that happens to me or Harriet. She'll never know the sword again. Besides, the first chance you get of riding to town, you could change the scabbard."

"We'll talk of it again in the morning, Harry. I think it very kind of you to have brought it."

"Harriet thought of it too," said the boy.

Mr. Darrell had noticed that he always spoke of his sister with himself as if they were inseparable.

"Did she?" he said. "I wonder why? She must be gentle-hearted—Miss Harriet. Shall I carry you back to bed, Harry, so that your feet don't get cold on the floor? How old are you?" he asked impulsively, as he gathered up the light weight.

"Twelve, nearly thirteen." With a sigh of fatigue and relaxation the boy laid his head on the man's shoulder. "Do you suppose that I shall live very long, Mr. Darrell?"

The tutor frowned, wondering with rage what had been discussed in this boy's presence.

"You are far too young to think of such things," he answered clumsily.

The child replied:

"There are children of our family who have died much younger—I have seen their names on their tombs."

"You must not think of it, nor of anything sad. Come, I must take you back to your room, but I cannot carry you, after all, for I must take the light too."

"I can find my way in the dark."

"Yes, but this is your home; you have been here all your life. I should stumble and go astray and attract attention. Come, we will take the light and go back quickly to your room."

"I should like to sleep here, might I? I have always liked this chamber."

His errand accomplished, the child had become

drowsy. He yawned and began to roll himself up in the ends of the curtains with their embroideries of fox-red acorns and dark green oak leaves.

"I wish you could, Harry; I'd give much to keep you, but perhaps it would not do if your bed was found to be empty."

The young man paused, hesitant, perplexed, regarding the child with an almost intolerable yearning. Why had that handsome young vixen spoken of the boy as an idiot? He had known at the time it was a lie. It was not true, of course, of the sister either. He had to use an effort that was almost violent to check himself from questioning the boy as to all the circumstances of his life and that of his sister. Another time, perhaps, without breaking faith with his employer, without affronting the boy's confidences, he might be able to discover something. But to-night he only permitted himself one remark as, with the candle in his hand, he guided the boy out into the chill corridor.

"You must be glad that your sister was not married to-day—you would have lost a dear companion."

The boy shook his head.

"No. I like Daniel. I might have gone to stay with him. I don't like this house."

"Nobody likes the house," thought Mr. Darrell, "yet how many people live in it and not one of them is really compelled to do so." He smiled with irony as he remembered that he was of that number.

The boy led him swiftly down a passage, down a short stairway, up a short stairway, into another passage, then paused before a door which he opened with elaborate precaution so as not to make

a sound. Mr. Darrell waited on the threshold, thinking perhaps a servant slept with the child, but the boy, having opened the door, beckoned him within, and the young man followed into a large chamber which his flickering candles only fitfully illuminated.

There were two beds in the room and neither had a canopy. But one was curtained by a long greenish drapery fastened to a baldaquin that projected from the wall, and the boy tiptoed to this.

"She is asleep—Harriet is asleep."

With the utmost embarrassment the young man murmured:

"I should never have guessed that you slept in your sister's chamber."

The boy whispered very low:

"Yes, I do, when I am sick and frightened, or when we feel very lonely. I was rather ill last night, you see, and she sat up with me for a long time. I'm afraid I broke a promise to her. I said I'd keep the sword till the morning, but when I saw she was asleep I couldn't wait——"

"Hush, you'll wake her," said Mr. Darrell.

He could not leave the room without gazing at the child—she seemed no more, he could think of her as no more—within the small, straight bed, the candlelight creeping over the undisturbed coverlet that gleamed with threads of silver in the border, over the young face and soft hair that seemed as silver too—nay, that was too harsh a comparison—which seemed of the texture of a wind flower or a lily bell. In her sleep was revealed the beauty he had only guessed at when he had glimpsed her waiting.

She was, in her slumber, in these circumstances,

in this light, in that attitude, of a singular beauty, with no more colour than a flower under water and her features only defined by the faintest of shading. She seemed to the young man who looked at her so earnestly as if some special purpose, some special care had gone to her fashioning—a fantastic, an absurd, thought, but, unforced, it had come to him.

He withdrew towards the door, abashed and ashamed.

“Get into your bed, Harry. I’ll see you in the morning. I expect we’ll be good friends. I can teach you all sorts of things you’d like to know.”

He helped the boy into the small bed near the door; the warm melted wax from his candle was dripping on to his fingers and he feared that it would go out and leave him in the dark. He noted on a table by her bed, he would not look beyond those long green curtains again, an open book—it was the book she had been reading when he had first seen her on the couch. He wondered if the pages lay pressed apart on the child’s drawing of the three interlaced “H’s”—he wondered but he would not satisfy his curiosity. He heard the boy say shyly:

“You like the sword?” He felt him put up his arm and clasp his neck and kiss him.

“I like it very much, Harry, but we’ll talk about that and other things in the morning.”

“These idiots?” he thought, with a hard contempt not only for the woman who had told him that tale but of his own transient credulity in believing it. “These brainsick, or afflicted in mind or heart or soul?”

He suspended his thoughts, his dreams, his excitements and apprehensions, and walked warily

through the night back to his own room. As he closed the door a dismal feeling of unreality oppressed him, a dull sensation of disappointment as one who enjoys a delightful vision and wakes to find it fled, as one who is visited by an exquisite phantom in the night and in the morning there is nothing. But here was a tangible proof—there was the bed where the boy's light form had pressed, and there was the sword with the gaudy tasselled scabbard that expressed the purse-proud man's taste.

The tutor put out his candles and cast himself down gratefully on the bed that a little while before had seemed so distasteful, and sunk into a sleep that was of a nature rare to him, for it was the sound sleep that only comes to those who have peace of mind.

CHAPTER VIII

THE tutor breakfasted alone in the room where he had dined the night before with Madame Duchène and Miss Flora. A lacquey brought him a message—he was to give his first lesson to his pupils at eleven o'clock, and he found it hard to pass the time until this hour arrived, for suddenly out of dullness and tedium and hostility to all about him he had taken a passionate, a poignant interest in the inhabitants of Criffel Hall.

The careless disorder of the vast establishment, the crowd of parasites and dependents, the waste and glare of wealth and power, the lack of comfort or harmony which were crudely apparent, no longer jarred on him. He had become indifferent to everything save the strange brother and sister with whose destinies he already felt his own subtly, intricately involved.

Flora Brodie? Was he not interested in her? He asked himself that question as he roamed about the library looking at the backs of the books, pulling them down, beating the dust from their pages. Interested? He would have to feign to be if he wished to remain where he was. In a sense he was in her power—she had warned him of that and so had others. She had told him a senseless lie last night—well, perhaps not so senseless either. She had warned him of how she expected her half-brother and her half-sister to be treated. Perhaps there might be some foundation, in fact,

for what she said. To such a nature as hers, the introspective, the dreamy, the sensitive, the delicate in mind and body, might appear idiotic.

Precise to his appointment and guarded in his manner, he found his pupils and Madame Duchène in the pleasant cabinet overlooking the garden which, it was evident from the pair of globes, the maps on the walls, the books and desks, had long been used as a schoolroom. From the window could be seen the leaden fountain where he had stood with Flora Brodie last night, and which looked stiff and commonplace in the daytime. There was something trivial and monotonous in the thin jet of water splashing into the wide, flat basin.

The boy was already busy with his lessons at the desk against the wall. He was laboriously copying out a Latin exercise and did not look up when Mr. Darrell entered.

Madame Duchène was seated in the window-place and occupied with her seemingly interminable knotting, which she executed with an energy that appeared vicious.

The half-sisters were at the centre table, Harriet seated and Flora standing, arranging some sprays of fading heather and ripening dogberries in a vase.

Though he was angry with himself for what he felt was a weakness, Mr. Darrell was secretly again impressed by her brilliance—he could find no other word for it. She appeared to radiate light and the smile with which she greeted him seemed candour itself.

On the other hand, Harriet only gave him a listless look. She appeared pale, downcast, silent, and she gave no hint of the beauty of which he

had had so heartrending a glimpse last night, but he treasured his remembrance the more. It was like a diamond worn in the bosom, a hidden pleasure; it was like the rainbow in the mirror, a "veil'd delight."

It gave him the impetus to dominate the situation, to overcome his awkwardness, bewilderment and dislike.

"Whom am I to teach, and how?" he asked, smiling pleasantly. "Miss Flora will hardly be at the same stage as Miss Harriet, and neither will require the tuition that Master Harry needs."

"Oh, Harry," replied the elder girl carelessly, "is not much trouble. You set him some exercises and he copies them. You give him some books to read and he reads them until he has a headache. Harriet may pencil some flowers or shells while we read together."

"That is a careless and awkward arrangement, Miss Flora, and will benefit no one. And need Madame Duchène," he asked, turning deliberately towards that lady, "weary herself by remaining with us?"

"Oh, she is always here while we do our lessons, but it is silly, no doubt."

"No doubt indeed," smiled the tutor. "You, Miss Flora, are, I believe, a brilliant scholar; you can have no concern, therefore, in what I must teach your brother and sister."

She looked at him steadily, evidently doubting if she understood him.

"Perhaps not," she conceded, after a second.

"Very well, Madame Duchène can go and I will remain in the window-place, and hear what success you make of your new task, Mr. Darrell."

This was not at all what he had intended or

wished, but he gave in with as good a grace as he could muster.

Seating himself at the table as Flora Brodie took her place at the window, he asked the silent younger girl to bring him her work and to show him at what point she had arrived in her studies. Without replying she pulled out a drawer in the table and handed him a neat pile of exercise books, text books, and carefully-covered sheets of foolscap.

"You, too, Master Harry. Will you bring me what you are working on?"

The boy obeyed and sat down gravely the other side of him, while the governess left the room with a disagreeable laugh, which was echoed in lighter tones from the window by Miss Flora.

The tutor was conscious that his position was awkward, almost ridiculous, and he was aware that Flora Brodie was watching him, though he never glanced in her direction. He knew that she was regarding him with amusement, with suspicion, perhaps with hostility, and he was suddenly aware that he could not afford to risk offending her because he no longer wished to leave Criffel Hall.

This realisation helped him to put through his task. In an impersonal voice and with a gentle manner as if he addressed mere children, he went through the work of the brother and sister, which was by no means as faulty and careless as he had expected. The boy's exercises were backward for his age, and the girl's work showed odd and pathetic mistakes which seemed more, however, due to lack of proper training than to intelligence. Where he could he praised, and he could see by the eagerness with which the two diffident young

creatures received this encouragement how rarely it had been given them.

He was touched and excited to find that his expressed admiration of the neatness of her handwriting caused Harriet Brodie to flash into some animation, and when he commended the swift accuracy of her replies to some of his simple questions, she cried out:

"You, then, do not think I am an idiot?"

"Who, Miss Harriet, could think such a thing?" he asked, schooling himself to quiet.

He heard Flora Brodie rise, he could sense the impatience and majesty of her movement, as she exclaimed:

"You forget yourself, Harriet, it is not for you to ask questions, nor to express opinions."

Harriet, her flash of pleasure at the praise to which she was so unaccustomed instantly extinguished, turned aside with a nervous gesture that Mr. Darrell winced to see, and with trembling fingers swung the celestial globe in the heavy wooden frame.

"Why don't you attend to your lessons, miss?" urged Flora in a mocking tone. "You see, sir, she is incapable of any continued attention."

The tutor was silent, blaming himself for cowardice. But he knew that his future in this strange establishment rested entirely on the decision of the capricious woman who spoke so cruelly; any defence of Harriet at the present moment would be ill-timed and end for ever any possible use that he might be to her. He was surprised at the trend his thoughts were taking; but a few hours ago he had never seen her, and now he was controlling himself, acting as he thought in a mean fashion, sitting silent before a

woman's sharp tongue that he might be of use to her—and of what use could he, so helpless, so dependent, possibly be? So he thought while he kept his dark eyes fixed on the constellations, comets, monsters and ogres painted in greenish hues on the shining yellow varnished papers of the celestial globe that twirled under Harriet's fingers. He remembered with shame that the very guineas which had bought the coat he wore and had brought him on his long journey, had been provided by the bounty of Flora Brodie's father.

The arrogant young woman goaded his silence, which she took perhaps for acquiescence in her attitude towards her half-sister.

"Pray, Harriet, do not keep playing with that globe like a simpleton; if you cannot give your mind to your lessons you may leave the room."

Miss Harriet rose with violent haste, but with an unchanged face and no sign of emotion. Without looking to right or left she ran swiftly to the door, pulled it open, and was gone.

"There, what do you think of my half-sister now?" demanded Flora triumphantly.

Mr. Darrell mastered his rage; he was surprised at himself, for it seemed too profound to have been roused by the petty malice of a woman.

"I think she is very unhappy," he said. He rose, for Flora was standing, a pace away the other side of the table. "Are these lessons to be like this? They are a farce indeed. Why have I or any other man been engaged for this impossible task?"

He spoke steadily, without servility. He knew that it would be very wise for him to flatter Flora Brodie, but he could not bring himself to do this, and he sopped his pride by arguing to himself:

"If I do not dominate her she will dominate me. After all, perhaps it is not wholly in her power to send me out of her house. I could go to her father."

She replied lightly:

"It is for you to arrange your lessons."

"I can do nothing while you remain in the room."

He had expected a display of temper in answer to this, but instead she said mildly:

"Very well, to-day was but a trial. To-morrow you shall have it as you wish. Now, as there is some time to spare, will you not read with me a little and see how much I know?"

His anger sank at this; she was either childish and given to quick changes of mood, or she was very skilful at controlling herself.

"Your brother and Miss Harriet, will they not require attention?"

"Harriet will go to her room—she has a maid who is very fond of her—old Janet—she will look after her. Or perhaps Madame Duchène will take her for a walk. Harry will go to Mr. Bonthron, they are great friends."

So saying, Flora seated herself at the table; her pretty hands clasped a little satchet, she had her books ready, and in a moment they were spread on the table and she invited him to admire her studies. He could not help being amused and even a little moved at the proud way in which she brought out her essays, her verses, her translations from French, Latin and Italian, her prim little dissertations on morality and philosophy. She was all sweetness now, attention and decorum, and Mr. Darrell, for all his preoccupation was not wholly insensible to her sparkling beauty, to her

flattering voice, her graciousness, her elegant airs of a learned cultured woman.

When she excused herself humbly for the many faults in her exercises, he told her that a fine lady had no need to be a penman. At that she looked up from her books and gazed at him with her eyes that were of so extraordinary a radiance and pushed her smooth white fingers up into the tangle of her bright hair, while in a gentle voice she thanked him for his forbearance with her ignorance.

"You have endured me for an hour, that is enough." She put up her books, and as he did not speak, added, as if she made an effort to please: "To-morrow, as I say, all shall be different. You may have Harry alone for an hour or so in the morning and for the same time in the afternoon; he cannot stand much, poor child."

Mr. Darrell seized on this opening to refer to their strange conversation of last night. As he spoke he looked over her shoulder and through the window at the lead fountain where they had talked together in the twilight.

"I am happy to say, Miss Brodie, that I don't think your brother weak in his intellect, nay, nor your sister," he added.

"Half-brother and half-sister," she corrected him, "and I know better their state of mind than you can, sir." She rose. "You said just now you did not think she was happy, though what of me? Didn't I give you my confidence last night?"

"It shall not be abused, but there may be another opinion; you might be mistaken."

The girl gave him a musing look.

"Might I? Well, sir, you must wait and judge for yourself and perhaps you will speak to Dr.

Hay or to my father. Do you think it likely that I should sacrifice myself here if these two poor creatures were fit for society? Don't you suppose that I remember their mother and how she lived and died?"

Mr. Darrell could not answer these quiet words, which were spoken with such an accent of serenity and sincerity that he wondered, with a horrid pang, if after all he had been deceived, thought that perhaps his fancy had deluded him, and that he dwelt too much on the edge of things, made perhaps too little of reality, could not fuse the seen with the unseen and so was often deceived. It was possible that he had seen in this boy and girl a spirit and an intelligence that was not there. In silence he gathered up his papers.

"Don't be angry with me," said Flora Brodie, "I need a friend. Don't give them all your pity."

"It seems odd, Miss Brodie, that you should ask me, a stranger, and one of no importance, to be your friend?"

She caught him up quickly:

"You think that I should have relations! Well, I have none, none who care. I am the last of my mother's family—I told you trustees who have no concern in me hold my estate until I am twenty-five. There have been those who have come here and who have gone again, but we are too difficult and, some think, too unpleasant."

"Well, as you wish. But, of course, Miss Brodie, I want to be your friend if you'll trouble to make me one."

"Yes," said the girl frankly, "I want you for a friend. You're different from the others we have had here. No doubt you are poor, you must have been desperate to have come, but you don't cringe

or flatter and you're not afraid of us like the others were. You're not trembling for your salary, and your food and your rooms like Mr. Bonthron, Mr. Moffatt, and even Dr. Hay."

"Perhaps not, Miss Brodie, and yet maybe I should be very sorry if you were to send me away."

At this concession to her authority, the first he had made, he saw the colour suddenly flush into her cheeks and her lustrous lips part in a smile. He was truly startled that he was able to so affect her and he thrilled with a secret sense of power.

She looked at him as if about to speak, but no words came; there was something in her face that was light and beauty and also suffering. He turned to the celestial globe and with a steady finger swung the painted constellations round on their pivots, and when he took his attention from this distraction and looked over his shoulder, Flora Brodie had gone, though the sense of her presence was powerful about him.

CHAPTER IX

AT the end of a week or so, the new tutor made his report to Sir Thomas Brodie. It had been a period without incident to the young man, a suspension of interest, almost of activity, he had seen so little of his pupils and hardly ever spoken to them alone. There had always been the French governess, or the chaplain, or the librarian present when he gave his lessons to the boy or to Harriet Brodie. Miss Flora herself had withdrawn into what seemed to him an unaccountable seclusion. She read with him now and then, but never alone; she seemed to have no further interest in her books of poetry or philosophy, in her blank verse or French lyrics.

Sometimes he would hear her singing or playing in another apartment, but she never invited him to partake of these diversions.

He had made friends with the boy and had found him, though backward, timid, and slow, by no means deficient in understanding and warm and sensitive in his nature. But no incident like that of the sword had occurred to show to him the child's heart. He saw no more of him than the brief lesson hours revealed; the tutor believed the chaplain and the librarian had been set to watch him and his charge, to take the boy away as soon as his set lessons were over.

Of Harriet he had seen still less. Every morning and every afternoon in the closet where they worked she brought him her exercises and stood

meek and silent while he corrected them, said "Yes" or "No" to his comments, and went away again without scarcely a glance. It was a painful effort for him to persuade himself that this was the creature so exquisitely fashioned, so satisfying in her loveliness that he had seen slumbering between the tall green curtains.

As he stood before his employer he forced himself to an attempt to challenge some of the difficulties of his position.

Sir Thomas Brodie listened with a mingled indifference and uneasiness while Mr. Darrell put his case. The elder lady, he argued, was beyond his teaching, not, of course, he explained with a slight smile, that her accomplishments were so polished or her learning so immense, but she was formed in character and tastes and her poetry and her philosophy and her translations were, like her botany and her sketching, mere pastimes "for one," finished Mr. Darrell courteously, "who had other and more absorbing interests in life."

The yellow, sagging face of the baronet had darkened when he heard these words. He fidgeted in his chair, pulled open and shut the drawers in the cabinet of medals on his bureau. There was a considerable litter still about him—account books, bills, sheets of cataloguings, medals in trays and cases, the glitter of the old, fine, embossed gold showed curiously among the tumbled papers.

Mr. Darrell continued in the task that he had set himself, but with added difficulty and a decreasing hope of success. It was so plain that he spoke to an old, tired, worn-out man, who had no interest in the world beyond his personal comforts, and the hobby of which he had made an obses-

sion. His steward had just paid him a visit, and Mr. Darrell noted from the corner of his eye numerous reports on the estate cast down carelessly and pushed aside, no doubt to be overlooked indefinitely—if the baronet were not plundered by those he employed he was a fortunate man.

Irritated by his own sense of despondency, the tutor forced himself to continue. He spoke, in tones carefully impersonal, of the boy and Miss Harriet. He suggested that they should not be so constantly supervised; he begged that he might have Master Harry for longer hours, not for lessons, but for companionship, for consolidating a friendship that he believed he had been already fortunate enough to place on a solid basis. He stressed the fact that the boy was solitary, a little backward for his age, but not lacking in intelligence.

"Yes, sir, intelligence," repeated the tutor, fixing his dark eyes steadily on the weak, bloated countenance before him.

"He ought to go to school," muttered the baronet with increasing uneasiness, "but he is not strong enough. Dr. Hay thinks that his mind won't stand much. Well, you must do what you like, you have a free hand. I haven't interfered with you in any way."

"No, sir, and I'm most grateful. But there are others."

"What! You complain? The chaplain is to teach Harry and his sister divinity, and Dr. Hay is to inspect their health."

"No, sir, I don't complain," Mr. Darrell interrupted, "but I am a newcomer here and set below everyone in authority. And I speak for

myself, too; I have too much time on my hands. I dislike idleness."

"Yes, one's very much cut off from the world here," groaned the baronet. "I couldn't endure it myself if I were young and strong. But when you come to seventy years and over and have lived your time——" he pulled out a tray of coins, picked up one and stared at it lovingly, then, with what seemed to the tutor an incredible indifference to his affairs, began to ramble on about his former life—his travels, his adventures, his intrigues, his speculations, the way he had made money easily, how he had bought coal and plumbago mines and half the countryside. He chuckled over dark experiences, then broke off suddenly, still staring at the coin, to ask the young man if he knew Rome?

Mr. Darrell, utterly disappointed, said "Yes."

At that the baronet showed him eagerly one of the secret medals of Tiberius, struck for the Emperor's own pleasure in one of the palaces where he held his profane and secret festivals. The medal had no picture to give Mr. Darrell, he was out of tune with history, but he recalled his own experience in Rome. He remembered the pastures where the goats nibbled the tufted grasses round the amber-coloured capitals of the buried columns, where the lazy shepherds piped beneath the broken colonnades in the temple of Mars the Avenger. He had not been happy in Rome—he had been bearleader to a sullen young lord—but it was there he had first noticed with a tremulous and uncertain hope that he could call pictures into his mirror. He brushed aside these recollections and returned to his speech, but the effort to force

his subject on this indifferent, hostile, half-senile old man was now almost too much for him. He heard his own voice, faint, disinterested; he did not dare to mention the girl, but he tried to plead for the boy.

But when he came to a pause the baronet shrugged his shoulders and put down the medal of Tiberius, plainly disgusted that it had not been more intensely admired.

"Oh, the boy," he said, "the boy——"

Mr. Darrell sensed with a chill that the father did not think that the son would grow to manhood. The very mention of him seemed to start a train of disagreeable associations in the old man's mind. He thought perhaps of the pretty, insane mother; he thought perhaps of his own youth. Mr. Darrell rose and made a last effort.

"Well, sir, may I take it that I can spend a longer time with Master Harry? I might perhaps go abroad with him—he rides, I think?"

"Why, of course he rides—every day—and his sister, too."

"Not with me," said the tutor.

"Not with you? But I never heard that Bonthron or Moffatt enjoyed himself on a horse."

"Master Harry goes with a groom."

"Well, he can go with you, when and where you like, I don't care. I ought not to be plagued with this sort of thing. I told you when I engaged you that you would have everything in your power. Who's been interfering with you?" he added, with a sudden shrewd understanding of the situation. "Flora, eh?"

"Miss Brodie, sir, is the mistress of your establishment."

"She's a wonderful girl," said the baronet;

"see how different she is from the other two. Her mother was a beautiful woman—I was proud of her. Have you seen her portrait at the end of the gallery?"

"No, sir, I haven't been in the picture gallery—it is kept locked."

"Yes, I suppose so. It is a long time since I went anywhere in the house. It is too large and there's too many people in it, and I suppose they all idle and cheat and waste. But what's the matter for that?" He began to ramble on about his daughter. "Flora's very wealthy, you know. Her mother was an Elliott and an heiress—she'll have everything when she's twenty-five—a beauty and an heiress, and a very clever woman." With a foolish glance he added: "Now I wonder what her story will be?" Then he turned his back on the young man and with half-crazy impatience knocking aside the papers, began to sort out his medals. A case of his treasures had newly arrived from London and they were not yet catalogued.

Mr. Darrell realised that he had won a useless victory. What would it avail him to tell Flora Brodie or any of her dependents that he had received this permission from the old man whom nobody regarded?

"Would you give your orders yourself, sir?" he urged, "to someone, even to Mr. Bonthron—I don't want it to go on my word only."

The baronet swung round angrily in his chair:

"Eh, eh! what a matter you make of it all! Don't you understand I'm a sick man, not to be plagued like this?"

Mr. Darrell forced a smile; he knew that he was risking dismissal.

"I'll just ring your bell, sir. Mr. Bonthron's outside with your assistant in the next closet."

"Well, well," grumbled the old man, "if that's the only way to get rid of you——"

Mr. Darrell rang the bell and with the promptitude of one trained to instant obedience the librarian appeared. He, too, wanted to be at the task of looking at the newly-arrived medals, and he was irritated by what he considered the undue length of the tutor's interview which, taken with the visit of the steward, had wasted nearly all the morning.

"Look here, Bonthron," said Sir Thomas hastily, "Darrell thinks he doesn't see enough of his pupils. I don't know whose orders they are, but there's no need to keep up a constant watch and spying. The young man's all right, let him go out with the boy whenever he wants to, ay, and Harriet, too. They can ride together and take their amusements, can't they?"

"Yes, yes," said Mr. Bonthron, "there could be no possible objection, I am sure, Sir Thomas."

"Well, see to it, then. Tell anyone whose business it is what I said." Then, as the old librarian hesitated, looking in visible embarrassment from one man to another, Sir Thomas exclaimed in feeble anger: "What's the matter with you, man, and you too, sir?" He shot a vexed glance at the tutor. "Why don't you go? Haven't you got what you came for? And you, Bonthron, you heard what I said, didn't you?"

"Miss Flora, Sir Thomas," said the librarian, "it's been her orders, you know."

"Well, Miss Flora isn't mistress in this house yet and you can tell her so. And if she won't

listen—well, then, you must come to me, I suppose. And now, sir, if I might take the liberty——” he nodded towards the door, and Mr. Darrell, feeling that he had, after all, gained more than he had hoped, left the two old men as they closed in with gloating comments on the bureau on which lay the new case of medals.

CHAPTER X

THAT afternoon Mr. Darrell rode with the boy across the parkland which until now had been to him a mere view from his window, and the child was delighted at this concession. His spirits had notably risen with the fresh air and the exercise, and, though he looked as slender as a girl in his tight-fitting, stiffly-braided riding-suit, he had lost something of that air of alarming fragility his tutor always found so touching.

The tutor had not ventured to ask that Harriet might accompany her brother. He had won enough for a first attempt, and he felt it would be more prudent to wait before he pressed his advantage. Mr. Bonthron, he knew, had spoken to Flora Brodie, and there had been no objection made to his riding with the boy. A handsome mount had been provided for him without question.

His own spirits rose with the fresh air and the rich autumn sunshine and the feel of the strong, handsome beast beneath him. It had been a dry summer, and the leaves had fallen as soon as they had withered, and the trees made a stark tracery against the blue sky, which was cloudless to the purple-brown of the horizon. Underneath their horses' hoofs as they rode the curled leaves, dry and crackling, made a pleasant noise; the grass was the colour of straw, everything was dusty, and only the foreign trees, greenish-black with a

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blue bloom, showed any richness of colour in the bleached, parched landscape.

Mr. Darrell noted the size of the park. It was larger than he had imagined it would be; it seemed unending with its groves and alleys and undulating vistas, with its woods and drives and paths.

"You must guide me, Harry; remember I am a stranger here. Where are we to go?"

"Oh, I'd forgotten." The child reined in his little horse and said innocently: "You see, sir, I'd forgotten that we were free, but when I ride with George we always go either to the home farm and back or to the mausoleum and back and I was going in that direction to-day without thinking. Would you like to go to the home farm or the mausoleum?" he added anxiously, unconscious of the tenderness in the man's smile.

"Would you not care to go somewhere different, Harry? It is rather like a prisoner, is it not, to take a set ride every day to see the same things?"

"Oh, yes, we could go somewhere else, couldn't we, sir?" The boy's face was animated with a shy pleasure. "But do you think that Flora or Madame Duchène would object?"

"No," said Mr. Darrell firmly, "I have your father's permission to take you out, to go where we wish."

"Where we wish!" said Harry. "Then let us go and see Daniel—Mr. Steele, you know, who was to have married Harriet."

The tutor was taken aback by the innocent mention of this name which had been often in his own mind since he had come to Criffel Hall, but which he had not heard from anyone since the day of his arrival, which had also been the day of the broken

marriage. Nor, as far as he knew, yet, of course, much might happen in the vast house and he be ignorant of it, had the disappointed and perhaps humiliated bridegroom presented himself at Criffel Hall. Yet, why not pay this visit? He was curious, for many undefined reasons, to see this man, and, as the escort of the child, he had a good excuse for calling on Esquire Steele.

"Very well, Harry, if that will give you any pleasure, let us go there."

They were riding slowly over an open space of coarse ground in the midst of which grew massive chestnut trees on which hung the last scrolled brown leaves.

"We will go through the woods," said the child, pointing with his little whip ahead of him.

"We have not come far out of our way. I was thinking of going to the mausoleum, because we went to the home farm yesterday."

They entered the little wood where a wide path led between waist-high ferns, brown, dry, and coarse, and the twisting red, tawny stems of bramble. A checkered light filtered from the almost bare boughs of the young oak trees overhead.

"There is the mausoleum," said Harry, and Mr. Darrell observed with an unpleasant sensation a round building of fine brick rising out of a clearing in the midst of the slight trees. The two high-set windows were heavily barred, and there was a padlock and chain across the doors, above which was a stone with an almost effaced Latin inscription. The child pulled off his hat as they rode past, and, as the tutor paid the like reverence, Harry Brodie exclaimed simply:

"My mother lies there."

"Her body, perhaps," protested the tutor, who felt a considerable aversion from the lonely brick building, which seemed so inexplicably neglected and forlorn. "You must think of her soul, Harry, as being free."

"She never was free," replied the child, as if relating some ordinary fact not in the least to be wondered at. "When she was alive she used to be shut up, and the room had bars, like the mausoleum."

"Who told you that?" asked the tutor, startled. "She died when you were very young, didn't she? It wasn't your sister, was it?"

"Oh, no, Harriet never told me, though we often talk about it together. We think that if she'd lived we might have been much happier, you know. Yet perhaps they'd have put us away behind bars, too—sometimes we're afraid of that. Flora tells us that we ought to be shut up, we're so tiresome and give so much trouble."

"Your sister doesn't mean what she says," answered the tutor quickly, "and if she did she wouldn't have the power. I don't suppose for a moment, Harry, that your mother was shut up—it was only that she was ill and had to keep her room."

"Oh, no, she was shut up and locked away because she was different from other people. She was silly and tiresome, they say. I know that's true," said the boy earnestly, "all the servants say so, and I asked Mr. Bonthron and Mr. Moffatt and they both said I wasn't to ask questions, that it was no business of mine. And you know when people say that it means there's something hidden they don't want you to know."

Mr. Darrell sighed with sheer pity, and hastened

his horse; he was glad to be out of the woods and out of the sight of the mausoleum. The child, who was a good rider, eagerly kept beside him, and when they were out in the open country in the clear autumn sunshine again, the tutor said:

"I shouldn't think of those things if I were you, Harry, but of the future. One day all this domain will be yours, then you'll be able to do what you like with it—even able to leave it if you want to, go to London or go abroad. Have you ever left it?" he asked earnestly. "Have you or your sister ever left Criffel Hall?"

The boy shook his head.

"No. We've always been here. I don't think we shall ever go away."

Mr. Darrell was silent in sheer compassion. It was very curious to think of those two shut up in this little self-contained world under the indifferent guardianship of their father, the jealous eye of their sister, subject to the spyings and persecutions of servants and dependents, with over them the memory and the threat of their mother's fate. How often had he, in his wanderings, envied money and security, with a settled heritage, and how much happier he had been in his lowest despondency, his most bitter misery than these two who had everything that he had envied!

They passed out of the great gates where stone piers on which ramped armorial beasts grasping shields terminated the curve of the high brick wall, rode a little way along a lane the other side of which stretched the uplands on which the last heather showed like a stain of old blood and came, after a little while, to another gate of far more modest proportions which the boy said was the entrance to Mr. Steele's estate. And as they

entered the drive he could not refrain from asking, though he was half-ashamed of seeming to probe a child's secrets:

"Would you be pleased if your sister were to marry Mr. Steele, Harry?"

There was no mistaking the sincerity of the boy's answer.

"Oh, yes, pleased indeed. I like Daniel very much, and he likes me. Harriet is fond of him, too, and I can't think why she broke it all off the other day."

His delicate, candid face clouded with disappointment and Mr. Darrell felt chilled from disappointment also. Disappointment for what? What hope had been cheated or deluded? They were set too utterly apart, she had hardly looked at him and he, it was grotesque to think—— And yet—— He glanced down at the boy, and his expression was that of one who stays his own words with a finger on the lips.

They found Mr. Steele dismounting at the horseblock by his own white portico. He had been riding round his land, and was in rough country attire. He was a thick-set young man of medium height with blunt features, a freckled face and hazel eyes that held an earnestness that his expression belied. Mr. Darrell's first impression of him was that he was heavy and perhaps stupid, obstinate and perhaps dull, but the tutor changed this opinion when he noted the pleasant open eagerness with which Daniel Steele greeted the boy and the easy courtesy he used towards himself. The young man was plainly no fool or beefy country gentleman absorbed in his cattle and his flocks.

"I believe," thought Mr. Darrell as he dis-

mounted, at the young esquire's warm invitation, "that he is intelligent and good-natured. Yet to think of him as the husband of Harriet is grotesque."

He was further predisposed in the young man's favour by seeing the genuine delight of Harry in his company. The three entered the house together—a low, sprucely appointed parlour, which had none of the pretension of the great rooms in Criffel Hall and was infinitely more agreeable to the taste of the tutor. He was, however, but little concerned in his surroundings, his attention was all for the young man, and he observed that this interest was returned, for while Mr. Steele appeared to be absorbed in good-natured, laughing talk with the boy, showing him a new fowling-piece, and talking of a pony that he had bought and Harry had not yet seen that was snow-white to the least hair of its tail, the tutor knew that he was scrutinising him with the greatest interest, and, Mr. Darrell believed, some anxiety.

Strangers as they were to one another, these two men of about the same age had a common interest in the rare and pure pleasure of the child in this visit. Harry Brodie was happier than his tutor had yet seen him. He chattered of this and that, seemed intimate with everything in the house, stables, and gardens, and showed the eager pleasure of one who after a considerable exile has come home.

The glances of the two young men met over the boy's pale head as he handled the elaborate fowling-piece that was almost too heavy for him to lift.

Then Mr. Steele suggested a visit to the pony. A housekeeper was summoned with whom Master

Harry seemed very familiar, and the two of them left the room together, the child's voice high with excitement, that of the woman soothing and pleasant.

"I've never seen him like that before, sir," said the tutor.

"No," replied the other uneasily, without looking at his visitor, "Criffel Hall is too large a house for a young lad. It's rather a melancholy life, as I dare say you've observed already. How long have you been there?"

"Not much more than a couple of weeks." Mr. Darrell did not want to say how carefully he had numbered the days since he had seen this man's bride seated on the terrace steps with her hands clasped in her satin lap and shaking her head from one side to the other with vehement refusal.

"Well, perhaps you won't stay long." Mr. Steele's voice sounded wistful. "The last tutor was there three months. It's difficult, of course, difficult."

"He is wondering," thought Mr. Darrell, "how far he can confide in me. There's a great deal he wants to ask me, but he wants to be discreet and gentlemanly. He is forced to remember that I am a dependent, almost a servant."

But, if these were Mr. Steele's feelings, he made a generous effort to surmount them, for he said ingenuously:

"I dare say you've heard my name mentioned as that of the future husband of Miss Harriet?"

"Yes, I've heard that."

"And how the marriage was broken off—it was just about the time you should have arrived, I think?"

"Yes, I heard that also, Mr. Steele."

"Well, then," the young man paused in front of the tutor, his hands clasped behind his coat-skirts, his feet apart, his florid face slightly flushed above the fine, cambric stock, "there's no use in being awkward or shy with you, as I suppose. I'm longing for news—apart from the joy I have in seeing Harry, you've come like a godsend."

"News of what, sir, or of whom?" asked Mr. Darrell with some reserve. "You know yourself that Sir Thomas Brodie's establishment is very large and that it's possible to be a part of it and not to know much——"

Mr. Steele interrupted:

"Tell me something about Harriet. My position is peculiar and odious. Twice since the wedding day I have been there to try and see her, but they said that she was ill and sent the doctor down to interview me. He said it was nothing serious, but she wouldn't leave her chamber. Now, is this true, sir?"

"I give her a lesson every day, morning and afternoon," said the tutor reluctantly. "I must say she seems very downcast and silent. She seems pale, too, and languid. Ill?—I don't know."

"Do you think they'd allow her to see me if she wanted to?" insisted Mr. Steele with a frown.

"I think so. None of them is against your marriage."

"Well, then, it rests with Harriet herself."

"I think so, but indeed, I know nothing of her mind. It is a strange thing," added the tutor with an awkward smile, "for us to be discussing, seeing our respective positions and that we are utter strangers."

"I don't know why you should be formal,"

replied the other young man simply. "I should have thought we might have trusted each other—the Brodies and I have some common friends. Harriet doesn't go about much and when people call there they don't see her. I wish she could be persuaded to marry me."

And running on in generous candour, Mr. Steele emptied his overcharged heart, full of long-repressed sadness and apprehension, without noticing the frowning reserve of the lean, dark stranger to whom he spoke.

"There's nothing you can put your finger on, there's nothing you can make a complaint about?"

"She seems to have every attention."

"But you must have seen for yourself that the father's incapable. And the household, of course—why, they're just dependents and flatterers—and I don't trust that woman Duchène. And Miss Flora——" He came to a pause on the name, which Mr. Darrell repeated.

"And Miss Flora? She is the mistress, of course. I've been made to feel that. This is the first time that I've been out with Harry, or I dare say we should have visited you before. It was his first thought to come here."

"Yes, I suspected that." The young esquire sighed. "But I don't know whether it's just carelessness——"

"What should it be?"

"Don't try to put me off," interrupted Mr. Steele impetuously. "Harry'll be here in a moment; we shan't have long together. I'm talking to you like this because Harriet is in the position of your pupil and of my affianced wife. You are inside the house, you see her, I can't.

Please listen. I have known her ever since I was a little boy and she was a baby—there's nearly ten years between us. Don't think because she wouldn't go through with the ceremony when it came to it that she holds me in aversion."

"I formed no conclusions, Mr. Steele."

"I thank you. Harriet has been neglected since her mother's death, sir. Her health is feeble and her mind capricious, she has had no attention. Miss Flora overshadows all."

"That I have observed."

"The governess, the maids, the chaplain are the mere toadies of Miss Flora. Sir Thomas lives apart, the prey to the last person who has had speech with him. In such an atmosphere a nature like hers becomes—I don't know how to put it—stifled. She is a victim of moods, fits, even delusions. You may," he added with a touch of defiance, "even hear her spoken of as afflicted in her intellects."

He lowered his eyes and Mr. Darrell forced himself to answer.

"In her readings, her exercises, her behaviour, I have found evidence of a normal, if overclouded, intelligence."

"I know. Former tutors have been the servile followers of Miss Flora and have given Harriet no encouragement. I saw at once that you were not of this temper and resolved to take you into my—confidence, shall we call it?"

"I am pleased," said Mr. Darrell, and hardly knew if he spoke the truth or not.

Daniel Steele hurried on:

"Some fear or illness overcame Harriet that morning—and I was hoping to take her away altogether. If she shows any aversion from me it is

foreign to her real nature," he added, speaking formally to conceal emotion. "For years I was happy in the assurance of her affection. This was returned."

Mr. Darrell leant in the window-place and stared out into the garden full of autumn flowers, in the centre of which was a dovecote, where the birds, brilliant white, green, and lilac in the sunshine, wheeled over the radiant heavens. He was silent because he was angry with himself for the absurdity of his emotions. Love, affection, tenderness, an amusing intrigue—he knew something of all these, but here was something different. "Why, I'm listening to him as if he were a rival!" he thought, as Daniel Steele hurried on, giving in brief and inadequate language an account of his long acquaintance with the Brodies.

"No doubt they'll tell you that her mother—the third Lady Brodie—was put away. So she was in a fashion, but she was only unhappy and sick—my own mother has told me that many a time. She said Lady Brodie wasn't defective in her mind but only sad at being married to an old man and coming to a place like this. And even then, Miss Flora as a child was termagant and ruled all."

Then, as he observed the other young man's silence, Daniel Steele continued more eagerly, as if most anxious to overcome opposition.

"I don't know what you thought, sir, or what conclusions you formed, but believe me, neither Harry nor his sister is what they try to tell you."

"No, no!" Mr. Darrell forced himself to interrupt. "I believe you, you need not concern yourself. Besides," he could not altogether

repress his inner bitterness, "of what use is my opinion or my friendship, sir?"

"It might be of the greatest use. If I could only see her sometime. She used to come over here freely when my mother and sister were alive. My sister died, sir, soon after my parents, and I'm now quite alone. But we were all so happy together, and she'd be quite gay. But they told her of her mother, and that was a cruel thing to do——" The young man paused. "She has fancies, I'll not deny it, but I could always soothe them away."

"He loves her," thought the tutor, "and I ought to be glad. And now," he said, in a tone that sounded in his own ears harsh and conventional, "there is no obstacle in the way of your union with Miss Harriet?"

"None whatever. I hold the consent of Sir Thomas—he cares little what becomes of his younger daughter. Though I am not a rich man I am a prudent one, and my estates, though contemptible compared with those of Sir Thomas, are not altogether mean."

Staring at the wheeling flight of the brilliant doves in the pale sky above the garden, the tutor repeated to himself firmly: "He loves her, and I ought to be pleased. And no doubt she loves him. Now, what has come between them?" Aloud he said: "Your marriage, sir, rests entirely on the caprice of the lady?"

"Do not say caprice, Mr. Darrell," replied the young man earnestly. "Harriet Brodie is of so fine nervous and delicate a nature, she has been, God forgive me for saying it, so ill-treated, that only the most tender kindness can restore her to her full powers of judgment and decision."

"I am sorry for you, sir," said the tutor quickly, "you are in a wretched position. I appreciate that, and admire your delicacy. But why do you endure it?" he added with a quick impatience. "Why don't you force your way in, sir, and speak to the father, insist that he allows you to see her? Why, you seem afraid of them!"

"I'm afraid for her, Mr. Darrell. I don't want to excite her, you understand. Though I'll not hear a word against her wits, yet there's always a danger——" he paused, flushed and embarrassed. "Besides, they have the power. The old man loathes to be disturbed or agitated, and he might in a moment withdraw his consent, send his daughter away. Flora——" he was about to express some vehement opinion of that young lady, but he checked himself. "I've no right to say anything, of course. There is so little one knows, but so much that one guesses. Tell me," he added awkwardly, "you have seen her—what do you make of it, what do you think?"

"There are some spirits," said Mr. Darrell, "that hover on the verge. I take, sir, Miss Harriet to live much withdrawn into another world. I, you must forgive me, sir, I've not yet observed her—I've but seen her for these lessons and there's usually the governess in the room."

"She has never mentioned," asked Mr. Steele, frowning, "anything that troubles her?"

"No. Do you think there is some such thing?"

"I don't know." The ruddy young man seemed reluctant to speak and yet curious to have a confidant. At length he came out with: "She sees things, I believe. There was something about a mirror."

At this word Mr. Darrell turned away sharply

so that his back was to his host. He gave a quick exclamation and said that, carelessly putting his hands on the sill, a bee had stung him.

"I am sorry for the interruption." He bit his forefinger. "There, it is gone. Tell me, you said that Miss Harriet spoke of a mirror?"

"Well, you know, one dislikes to talk of it, but I think she had some old nurse—dead now—who used to look into some polished surface—what was it?—a jet brooch? I don't know now—some foolish pretence at sorcery. And Harriet used to try, too, as a child. I remember how we used to laugh at it. As a child! what am I saying? She is a child now."

"Did you see her with the mirror, sir? If there is any old mirror in the house I think it should be removed."

They heard the high laughter of the child in the passage. Forcing his inclination, Mr. Darrell said:

"Pray, trust me, sir. I will do what I can. I understand the situation, and I think that Miss Harriet would be happier here than where she is. Don't think that sounds like an impertinence."

"No, no!" replied Mr. Steele warmly.

Before he could say more the child ran in, full of pleasure about the pony, all white to the least hair of the tail, with pale, silver-plated harness.

"Why did you buy it? For whom is it—so small!"

"It was for your sister. I am keeping it for her—I'm glad that you like it, Harry."

CHAPTER XI

THAT night Mr. Darrell uncovered the mirror, taking it from the goatskin case and setting it squarely on his table with a candle either side. There was nothing to be seen in the mirror, of course, but his own dark face, lean and frowning with intense earnest eyes, nothing to be seen but that. What should there have been reflected in those murky depths? It was all a folly and a delusion, and dangerous, too, and he had resolved to have done with it. Yet, how forget some queer experiment he had made, some strange powers he had felt conscious of, why resist the one pleasure, the one excitement of a starved, repressed life? When a man had nothing else, may he not have his "veil'd delight"?

He extinguished one of the candles and placed the other behind the mirror, then seated himself in front of the table, on which he rested his elbows, and took his face in his hands. Then, staring into the mirror beyond his own reflection, which he no longer clearly saw, he called her:

"Where are you, dear? Why don't you come? You might show yourself to me, like this just, sometime. Is it you whom I see sitting over those lesson books so downcast and sullen? I can't believe it."

He closed his eyes and tried to picture her as he had seen her sleeping between the long green curtains.

"Won't you make your friend, your confidant of me?"

She would be asleep now, perhaps with the book open at the page on which the boy had drawn the three interlaced "H's" on the table by her side. What had she worn when he had seen her? A garment that he thought was of fine white wool that would go to her feet, her long, delicate feet—he had noticed them in the doeskin sandals as she sat beside him with her books. When he had seen her in bed she also wore a white frilled cap fastened by pale, saffron-coloured ribbons—her light, smooth hair like a knot of satin fell below this. The sanctity of some other and more peaceful world had been about her as she slept. Was it profanity for him to endeavour to disturb this?

He opened his eyes and stared greedily into the mirror. Some blurred shape was forming there—the dimmest likeness of a woman whose unseeing glance moved to right and left, whose hands were clasped on her breast, who gazed deeply over his shoulder.

To Mr. Darrell there was an atmosphere in the room that was definite and overpowering as hawthorn perfume. It was a spirit that his fancy evoked, one that might be lightly clothed in almost ethereal flesh, a delicate and lovely body like a transparent vessel to hold the pure soul.

Yes, she would be sleeping now, free from the vexations of her monotonous life. She would be very beautiful with the untouched beauty of a young child. He did not need to look into the mirror. Closing his eyes he could see the light folding of her hands on her slight breast, both the colour of a jasmine flower, the infantile softness of her throat and cheek, the gentle flowing in and out of her breast. He seemed himself to be stand-

ing beside her, holding apart the green curtains, gazing down with troubled tenderness at her untroubled slumber.

She lay in the attitude of a tired child, sunk deeply into the pillows. She moved, unclasped her hands, flung one arm beneath her face while the other hung by her side. There was a fire in the room, the last faint ember's glow softly touched the edges of the coverlet on the straight bed. There had been two candles—one had gone out and the other burnt fresh and flaring in the great, dark room.

The young man's head sank forward on his breast. He, too, seemed to be absorbed into some strange and distant world as if her spirit had beckoned his away to dim playgrounds and left his body empty in his chamber and hers empty in her bed with the green curtains.

He sighed, and roused himself, and stared at the blurred and greenish surface of the mirror. Bending towards this he said in a low and steady voice: "Harriet." He could see nothing, but he thought that she had heard him and that somewhere near him echoed a long, deep, yet relieved sigh. He sank his face in his hands, he thought that she was there, and with a half-sad air put her hand on his dark locks. "I called you, Harriet; you were very far away."

Was not that her answer in his ears: "Very far away, but I have dreamed of this so often."

He roused himself with bitter violence: "No, this is all an invention. I am but deluding myself with a tale, and a folly, too."

He rose, finding himself quite chilled. He felt sick, too, and his head ached; with stiff fingers he returned the mirror to the goatskin case.

CHAPTER XII

FOR several days Mr. Darrell did not see Harriet Brodie; he had to be content with what news he could get of her from the boy. During this space he was careful not to touch the mirror.

Suddenly she appeared, during his lesson hour with Harry, and seated herself in her usual place and took out her books with a docile but abstract air. She was as usual, dull, almost stupid in manner, and a poignant contrast to Flora, who made some excuse to come in and out of the room and was brilliant, gracious, and gay.

The tutor had not lately any fault to find with the behaviour of the mistress of the establishment, who was able to make his position very agreeable, and he was not so inhuman as not to appreciate this and to be flattered by the deference with which she received his instruction, the sweetness and humility with which she conducted herself towards him. He confessed to himself that she knew how to behave, her courtesy was as exquisite as her former rudeness had been pronounced, though, no doubt, she was but playing a part to gain some end of her own. He was aware that she had never been denied anything in all her pampered life, and was likely to take every possible pains to gratify her desire, but still he admired her. He was not untouched by her radiance and animation. There were times when her vivid eyes looked so kindly on him, when her

dainty fingers touched his over the books, and her pouting mouth was softened as she uttered his name, when he forgot not only what he had heard against her, but his own miserable and penniless position.

"Why," he would ask himself, "is she exercising her flashing attractions on me? Grant that she is idle, yet surely I am a diversion that is beneath her notice?"

When he was alone with Miss Harriet Brodie he did what he had never done before—endeavoured to penetrate behind her submissive, remote manner. He held an open book in his hand and looked at it while he spoke. She wore a white dress with a blue sash and a little coat of yellow wool; she was slowly copying out a Latin exercise and appeared totally absorbed in her work, and he half-shrank before her apathy, but he forced himself to say:

"Miss Harriet, may I speak to you, not about your lessons?"

She raised her eyes, for the first time looked directly at him.

"What can you have to say to me?"

"I have a message from Mr. Daniel Steele."

"Oh!" she seemed vaguely troubled.

"Will you not see him? He is an old friend, I think, and only anxious to be of service to you."

"I believe he is very kind," said the girl in a low voice, "but I will not see him, not yet."

"Very well. But if I should meet him, may I not give him a message from you? Harry is fond of him; we went to see him the other day. It was a great pleasure to your brother. Perhaps," he closed the book and looked down at her, "you would like to ride with us one afternoon?"

"To ride with you?"

"Yes. Why not? Then you could visit Mr. Steele, or you could allow him to come here. He is concerned about you, he is troubled that you will not see him."

The girl rested her frail face in her hands and frowned as if she were puzzling out something.

"It is better for him to let me be."

Then Mr. Darrell, forcing his inclinations as he had forced them when he had spoken to Daniel Steele himself, said, in his eagerness to conceal his own heart, much more than he had intended to say.

"But, Miss Harriet, would you not be happier as the wife of Mr. Steele? If you could rouse yourself from this lethargy——" He paused and faltered before her look. "What is the obstacle?" he breathed, "what is the obstacle?"

She did not reply. Turning over the leaves of his book and not looking at her, he asked:

"Do you ever dream?"

"Oh, yes, I think so. I used to like to look into the tarnished mirror, but they took that away and I do not know where it is hung now."

"What did you see in the mirror?"

"I don't know. I think it was something that made me happy."

"Have you told anyone? Have you spoken of this?"

"Why should I? Nobody would care; they believe I am a fool as it is."

"But you mustn't think that," he said earnestly, forgetting everything in his desire to help and encourage her. He laid the book on the table and rested his hands on the back of her chair. She did not wince or draw away in the

least, though he had observed that she usually, with much nervousness, avoided any human contact, or the near approach of another personality. Instead, indeed, of withdrawing, she continued to look up at him, slightly frowning, her eyes intense, her lips parted as if she were very willing to understand what he was about to say.

"I—I don't know what to say. Do you think you know me, do you think you have seen me before? Why is it you take no notice of me when we meet like we did? And yet——"

She caught gently at his words:

"And yet——"

"I ought to be speaking for Daniel Steele," he murmured. "Can't you help me at all?"

"I am trying to remember," said Harriet Brodie.

The violent opening of the door caused them both to start with a sense of painful shock. The girl crouched down over her books with a movement that made Mr. Darrell taut with rage.

It was Miss Flora who had entered, and there was none of the courtesy in her manner, and none of the sweetness in her face that he had lately admired.

"Are these your lessons?" she demanded. "I see quite well, sir, why you go to my father and ask why your teaching may be in private."

"Oh, hush," he said sternly and wearily.

"What are these railings, Miss Brodie?"

"Railings! You have some courage to so speak to me! What were you saying to my sister? Perhaps you do not think that she is kindly treated?"

"How could I think so?"

Flora Brodie appeared to be about to make a

vehement reply. She glanced at her half-sister and smiled: Mr. Darrell, angry as he was, could not but once more applaud her self-control.

"Very well. Madame Duchène must share these lessons."

"I cannot give them under those conditions."

"Do you not like Madame Duchène?"

"Miss Flora, I wonder you can keep about you so ignorant and spiteful a woman."

"She is set over me by Sir Thomas."

"But you know very well that you do as you wish with your father."

"The governess amuses me."

"You mean that she flatters you."

"Well, perhaps. Who is there does not like flattery? I confess that I do. And Harriet, here, have you not been flattering her a little?"

Harriet, still with her eyes on her books, spoke:

"He had a message for me, Florrie, from Daniel. He and Harry went to see him, that was all."

"Well, I'm sure I don't know why you don't see Daniel yourself. You're a queer girl." She sighed and spoke again to the tutor. "I fear that you have an ill opinion of me. It is true that I and Harriet do not agree very well together, but you must, sir, have observed how difficult she is and why, when a suitable match is provided, will she not accept it and escape this life which is so disagreeable to her? Is it not common sense that she should do so?"

"I fear, Miss Brodie, that it is not a matter of common sense."

"What is it then?" she asked, and something in the prying tone of her voice and her bright look irritated him, and he spoke drily:

"Miss Harriet has not your clear mind and decisive character. She is of a strange, peculiar nature and lives much in dreams. I think that she will eventually marry your friend, Mr. Steele, but cannot you see that at present she shrinks from any reality?"

"Is that so, Harriet?" asked Miss Flora, with a light, mocking air. "Well, maybe. I will endeavour," she said, speaking directly to the tutor, "to understand my sister better, and I will endeavour to please you and do as you tell me."

This might be mockery, but it was very well done at least, and Mr. Darrell felt a certain satisfaction. It was not possible to resist a sense of power from seeing this beautiful and proud young creature melt into tenderness to please him and give her submission so soft and sweet an accent.

He turned to thank her and she put her fingers into his hands, and looked up at him with beseeching eyes.

"Have I pleased you?" she whispered, and she added, before he had time to answer: "This afternoon you ride with me."

CHAPTER XIII

THERE was a stinging wind upon the moor that tore the grey clouds that pressed low on the hills; the last sun of autumn had gone and stripped trees bent before the invisible menace of winter.

Henry Darrell and Flora Brodie had taken a lonely road at her imperious suggestion. They had ridden far past solitary farms and shepherds' huts, round the curve of a great mountain and a wide lake. It was a noble, a magnificent landscape, one to purge the soul of pettiness and meanness, sly doubts and humble fears.

The tutor was glad that she had chosen this background for whatever manner of interview it was that she wished to force upon him, for here he felt freed from her, released from all sense of her as his employer, as the woman who could turn him out of her house at a few hours' notice as if he were a lacquey. Here, too, he felt free from her as a fair young woman, passionate, and bold, and charming, who had power to trouble him. Though he was shabby and penniless and riding her horse and must go back to sleep under her roof and eat her food, he felt independent.

She was up to some tricks, he was sure, but he felt more excited than wearied at the thought of this, whatever it might be.

Flora Brodie also seemed to be enjoying an intoxicating sense of liberty. She was bold and merry, a charming companion, who had lost her tempers and affectations. Henry Darrell liked the

way she was dressed; she had discarded the rich fancies that she too often displayed and wore a plain, frieze habit, with her hair in a club with a dark ribbon.

"You don't ask me where we are going," she remarked joyously.

"Since I know nothing of the country, the question would be useless."

"But we have come a long way, you have realised that? See, the road is dwindling to a heath track, and if we were to follow that we should find that it becomes the bed of a stream—stones, over which water runs. So, we will leave the horses here in that little house by the gate—they call it the Wishing Gate."

She dismounted without waiting for him to help her and led her horse to a low stone, one-storied cottage that stood beneath a group of ash trees hidden between the road and the lake. Henry Darrell followed her; the man who took the horses nodded with respect and showed no surprise.

"He is used," thought the tutor, "to her whims. I dare say she has been here before with another companion."

Yet her air was innocent and pleasant as she paused by what she had named the Wishing Gate—a plain five bar of wood set in a break in the rough stone wall. It was cut all over with names and symbols and seemed very old.

"They say," she remarked with an indifferent air, "that if you make a wish with your hand on the gate it is fulfilled within the year. A pretty superstition, is it not?"

He did not reply; a grotesque, an absurd desire, a ridiculous hope had come into his heart. If he were to solve all his delicate and entangling

difficulties by a bold wish, and if some power were to grant that wish—— He answered himself with a deep irony: "Why, it would be very pleasant, but I must not be childish." And yet, after all, how could he formulate his intricate desires into one definite wish?

"Should I wish that I might know who it is that I think I see in the mirror? Should I wish that she might become visible to me? Should I wish to know if Harriet Brodie . . ." he kept his thoughts on the name, for his companion was asking him insistently what he was musing on.

"You look like a soldier now," she said, gazing at him from under level frowning brows, "so tall and straight and stalwart. Not in the least like a scholar, yet you're well enough there too. I wonder," she added, with a frankness that was not an impertinence, for it was softly expressed, "how a man like you came to be in this position where you have to endure a woman like me?"

"What compliment do you want in return for that?" he asked lightly, and they turned away from the gate without either of them having expressed the magic wish, and walking strongly, followed the road which became first a track turning sharply away from the lake, and then as she had said, the bed of a spring, and loose stones large and small over which the clear water ran. They had to step carefully from one boulder to another.

Clouds lowered about them, there were beads of moisture on her frieze habit, on his rough coat, and her hair hung damp.

Mr. Darrell enjoyed the adventure; it was long since he had felt equal with man or woman. He had no sense of inferiority now to this brilliant

and highly-dowered creature, who in a way had his material fortunes in her power. His manner changed; he was no longer so quiet, reserved, defiant, on his guard, as he had been in Criffel Hall. And yet all the while he knew that it was not the proximity of Flora Brodie that had excited him, making him bold and easy in look and word and gesture, but the memory of her sister Harriet, which grew and grew in his heart like a sinking flame in a dim lamp when the oil is poured in.

Flora Brodie told him that there was a large tarn which she wished to reach: it was a melancholy, gloomy place, no doubt, but it fascinated her. He made no objection, for it mattered little to him where they went.

They had to proceed slowly and often he had to help her from one wet stone to another by giving her his hand. Underneath the boulders ferns still lingered, kept green by the freshets of water. The misty air was sharp and fragrant.

Under her directions they left the wet stones and turned a little way up the hill. And then she said, with an air of delightful intimacy:

"Why do you stay, the place must be hateful? And I don't think you are the kind of man to do it just for—well, the advantage."

"I might be," he told her. "I have had the kind of life that rubs off fastidiousness."

"You came here, then, just like the others did—because you were tired and a little desperate. But you're not in the least like them, they were weary, broken, starveling dependents, and, of course, the salary is high."

He did not speak, and she answered herself with an impatient decision.

"But, of course, the place is impossible. You must think us vulgar, fools; you must despise us, I believe."

"What are you trying to make me say, Miss Brodie? I am already fond of your brother and I think I have been of a little use to him. My work is light. I am very handsomely treated."

"Oh, but it is no existence for a man of action."

"Miss Brodie, I have some while ceased to be a man of action."

"I don't like to hear you talk like that."

She seemed to identify herself with his interests, his dignity and pride, and he felt warm towards her because of that. She could so easily, in so many ways, have humiliated him.

They reached the tarn, black, in a little plateau within the hills. So still and dark was the small sheet of water that on this sunlit day it appeared like a slab of jet, and Henry Darrell thought of what Daniel Steele had said in his confused attempt at an explanation of Harriet Brodie's moods—the old nurse had a jet brooch into which she gazed.

It did not seem, even when the sun was high overhead and the sky clear, that there was any light reflected from these murky waters.

Flora Brodie seated herself on a smooth ancient stone by the brink of the tarn. She pulled off her gloves nervously and clasped her fine hands in her lap. Then she began to speak quickly:

"I felt so sad and disillusioned when you first came. I don't know, I haven't been here very long, you see. I was travelling, and everything went wrong. But I won't worry you with that; it doesn't concern you at all."

He stood apart while she continued to talk in

a commonplace way of her disappointments and dissatisfactions. There was a man somewhere, she told him, to whom she was half-pledged—a man of wealth and rank, but for whom she cared little, but it was a suitable marriage and she supposed that she must make it. It was to get away from the thought of it that she had returned to Criffel Hall—"and also for my duty to the others," she said.

He hardly listened to what she was saying, for he believed nothing of her words. He was trying to decide within himself as he stood at the edge of the dark water what manner of creature she was and what designs she had on him. Something in the pure, moist air, the loneliness or the exercise had given her a sparkling lustre; she had even more than her usual brilliance, and the ordinary comeliness of her youth was exalted into real beauty. Yes, in her plain attire with no ornaments nor any manner of adornment, she was beautiful seated there in the gloomy landscape before the black water, talking rapidly like one who eases herself by a confession of a dissatisfaction of herself.

"She is playing with me," thought Henry Darrell. "Underneath all this seeming honesty of purpose, I am but the object of her curiosity. She cannot understand why I have resisted her so long. I am perhaps a little different from any type of man who has come her way before. I am not her equal, yet she wants to show her power over me. It would, of course, be quite inexplicable to her if I were to resist her, yet it would please her, too, as long as I yielded in the end."

Probably there was some truth in what she said about another man she had left on some pique or

disgust, when she had come to the end of some emotional experience. He had met her when her life was for a while blank; in brief, she needed a new lover.

She stopped her rambling talk by saying directly:

"You ought to be sorry for me." Then, as he did not answer this challenge, she proffered another, which did, indeed, startle him considerably. "Why are you interested in Harriet?"

He felt that he had betrayed himself even by the pause in which he took to gather his self-control. When his answer came it was harsh, and, he felt, stupid.

"What a strange thing to say, Miss Brodie."

"Oh, don't be formal," she broke in, "do you suppose I haven't noticed? You're very careful, but she, of course, is only a half-wit. That's what makes it so strange—she understands nothing. She is not pretty either, so white and dull. Tell me, though, I am curious—why are you interested in her?"

"I am sorry for her," he replied sternly.

"What else?"

"I do not think that she is happy."

"Do you go out of your way to be sorry for everyone whom you believe is not happy, Mr. Darrell?" She mocked his precise tone. "I told you just now that I am not happy either."

"You could help yourself," he answered brusquely. "You could come and go as you wish, for you have money, position, beauty."

"Ah, you think that?"

"You know it. Your sister is, perhaps, beautiful, too, but I do not think there are many people who would tell her so."

"You are, then, sorry for her. And is it for her sake that you wish to stay with us?"

He turned on her with a sudden laugh that overwhelmed Flora Brodie's impertinence.

"I wish to stay with you for my bread and butter, because I am lazy and idle and with you I have a comfortable, well-fed, well-paid place."

"Only because I will it so."

"What difference does that make?"

She smiled, her face was dimpled like a child.

"Oh, Henry, you stay because you love me and I love you."

She spoke not with passion but with tenderness and affection. He turned and looked at her with sincere curiosity—her words might have been naked effrontery or a noble expression of a sincere pride. To gain time for himself he asked:

"What is my punishment if I refuse to play this game with you?"

"You break the rules already," she replied. The clouds had thinned and dissolved above them and the rain-washed blue of the sky showed in a transient gleam. There was something grand and unearthly in the loneliness of the landscape, something in the woman and the solitude and the moment that made Mr. Darrell feel that his defences were paltry and mean.

"Although you are so silent, you understand me very well," said Miss Brodie. She leant from the boulder and dipped the tips of her fingers in the dark water of the tarn; as he saw the bright drops slide down her hand he thought of the silver bracelet of water that he had seen on her wrist when they had stood together in the evening of his arrival by the lead fountain. "What shall we do?" she asked.

A pale light, steady, yet not strong enough to cast shadows, overspread the soft earth and made a faint glitter in the wet stones about the tarn. The mountains appeared for a second behind the blurs of mist, then were hidden by the rapidly descending clouds. Flora Brodie snatched off the moss and spirals of fern that grew round her boulder.

"You are in love," she insisted, and he could hardly refrain from replying: "Yes, but you are not my choice." Yet he was not sure that if he had spoken thus he would have been saying the truth, for he believed that he did, and had from the first obscurely desired her.

She seemed definitely pleased by his silence and hesitation, for she said with a triumphant lift in her voice:

"That is enough. We will return home; I think it is growing late."

"No. I don't think it's enough, Miss Brodie," replied the young man without moving. "Do you believe that I am so helpless and so contemptible, and in a way so in your power that you can use me for a diversion? Or . . ." he looked at her with gloomy eyes.

"Or what?" she said, rising up, and seemingly delighted that she had involved him in this discussion.

"Or you speak seriously—and that is not to be thought of."

"Well," she replied, "supposing it is not to be thought of? But that your first guess is right, and I am amusing myself? What have you to say? What do you mean to do?"

Her faint, half smile vexed him intensely; he swore to himself that she had no attraction for him. He believed that it would be almost simple

to placate her with flattery; yes, he must do that in order to remain in her father's establishment. His face darkened with impatience, he was not used to these situations—foolish, intricate, and leading nowhere. He had met women before who had shown a disposition to thus wreak on him their caprices, whims, and half-understood desires, but he had never yet been in a position where he was forced to endure them. He would not speak, and she stood there like a taskmaster waiting to see a slave set about his work again.

"Are you really," she asked, "so poor that you could not afford to leave us, even if I tormented you and humiliated you?"

He felt that she was goading him to the verge of a confession. She wanted him to say what he nearly had said—"I desire to stay, but not because of my poverty"—and then she would bring the question round to Harriet and find out a truth that he did not himself know to be a truth. So he answered hastily, defending himself with a cloud of words:

"Yes, as poor as that. Did I not tell you? I have failed in everything, and this is my final refuge. I believe I satisfy your father and do my work well enough. It is even possible that if you go to him with complaints he will not listen. Perhaps you have not so much power as you think. Come, let us go home, as you say, it is becoming dark."

"There is a rainbow," said Flora Brodie, as if she had not heard what he had said.

He was startled, forgot her existence, and stared round at the enclosing mountains. He could see no rainbow, but there was a faint mist of colour

where the receding sunbeams struck through the rain clouds on a distant mountain.

"You did not see it, but I did—there, in the distance," but even as she pointed at the mountain the scudding vapours hid it. But the word had been enough to alter his mood. A rainbow—he thought of that which had been reflected in his mirror in the miserable room in the sordid London street. He had not seen that either, perhaps even the reflection had been a delusion, yet he was conscious of a tension, of a rapture, of a promise, as if some appointment which had been made beyond all human calculations and knowledge would soon be kept, as if the "veil'd delight" might soon, and for ever, uncover the hidden face.

This feeling made him indifferent and tolerant towards Flora Brodie. He held out his hand to her in a gesture that might have been one of friendship and kindness, or merely a courtesy to assist her over the unlevel ground. He looked at her and was surprised to see her face was wet with tears.

"Remember," he said, "that we are none of us as miserable as we seem. To you I appear, no doubt, a wretched wastrel. . . ."

She said quickly: "No!" and her cold fingers clasped his hand firmly. "I saw you for what you are from the first, but I am nothing."

"Well, it was quite natural for you, Miss Brodie, to think that you could make an amusement of me, and there is no reason that I should not indulge your idle whim with some fantasy of pretended love, if . . ."

She had spoken too quickly for his thoughts; he did not know how to conclude his speech.

"You have made a promise to another," she put in quickly.

"Yes," he said gratefully, "to another. One who is far away."

She took her hand from his and put it to her lips.

"Am I to believe that?" she mused.

They walked down from the tarn together, and without speaking again, reached the white stone shepherd's house where they had left the horses. Miss Brodie suggested that they should lead the animals until the road became smoother, and side by side, with their bridles in their hands, through the wet vapours, they came out by the Wishing Gate in the stone wall, and there she paused and put her bare, rain-wet hand on the scarred, worn wood which was defaced with so many initials and symbols. Her manner was constrained and her glance was fixed on the ground.

"Are you, after all, going to have a wish, Miss Brodie? I should have thought that by now you would have had a chance to test the truth of that old tale?"

"No," she said, "I've never wished here before, but I do so now." She slipped the bridle reins up her arm and placed both hands on the gate. "This woman, this lover of yours, is she your wife, someone whom you have met and deserted and mean to return to?"

"I think of her as my wife."

"Well, then," said Miss Brodie quietly, "my wish is that this creature, if she really exists and you have not invented her to torment me, is subject to every evil."

He was startled by this unsuspected malice and cried out quickly:

"Don't say that!"

"Oh, then there is somebody, and you do believe in the Wishing Gate after all! I never tried it before myself; there was never anything I wanted very much, but I want this now—may she pine and wither and die so that there will be nothing between you and me—nothing at all."

There was a note of tears in her voice; she spoke more absent-mindedly than if she knew what she said, and this gave an added touch of uneasiness to Henry Darrell's dislike of the ugly little episode, for it seemed as if the wayward woman did not speak on an impulse of petty temper but with a deep, deliberate intention.

She mounted quickly and he was instantly in the saddle.

"We shall get wet," he said harshly; "the rain is closing down on us."

As they rode away he looked back over his shoulder towards the Wishing Gate, but it was already hidden in the thick mists.

CHAPTER XIV

HENRY DARRELL mused in his comfortable room on the combinations into which his life moved now and again like a puzzle that was often nearly clear, but never quite solved. This had happened to him before—an emotion there, a person here, an episode, an incident, all moving to what had seemed some considerable climax, some startling solution, then, all lost. The emotion vanished, the person gone away, the episode over, all meaningless and blank.

Perhaps it would be the same this time—some temper on the part of the sick man with which he had nothing to do, and he might lose his post—some fury on the part of Flora Brodie and she might take the two young creatures who had come to mean so much to him from his charge.

“Ah, well,” he checked his thoughts, he was weary of trying to piece it all together, of wondering, of speculating, but nothing would happen as he wished it, and it was useless to try to prearrange destiny. The soothing monotony of the raindrops beating on the window lulled his senses. He had looked out into the night—it was as black as if cloths were laid over the sky with only the sound of the raindrops against the pane and the trickling of the water from the eaves of some cornice nearby where it dripped into the darkness.

It was a pleasant room, he greatly enjoyed these hours to himself. He would often sit up half

the night for the pleasure of being alone, away from all of them, with the two mirrors—the greenish-black speckled mirror above the mantelpiece and his own, always so cautiously hidden in the goatskin case. He liked the old, comfortable, lavish furniture; he liked the bed with the white twill curtains with the fox-red acorns and harsh green oak leaves; he liked the massive silver sticks into which they put the candles and the log fire they allowed him on the wide hearth. The thought of his own few books and toilet appointments took on a new dignity in his specious surroundings.

But all this, this air of comfort, stability, and luxury, was but a delusion. The place was not his: in a week's time, nay, in a day's time, he might have left it for ever. Yes, there was not a servant in the huge establishment who was not in a more stable position than he was, for the work he did was despised and he himself was not valued by anyone save Flora Brodie, and by her only as a butt for her wayward moods.

He had done well with the boy, he knew that. The pupil liked, perhaps loved, him; he had opened his mind and given him pleasure. He even thought that there was a slight return of health into the wistful face, the spare figure. The child seemed to have more animation and interest in life than he had shown before the new tutor arrived. Bonthron had remarked on this, yes, and the Doctor had given a happier report. Why had they not thought of it before?

As he leant back in his worn chair, his dark head against the broken gold and silver cords of the heraldic design, he thought with scorn: "Why

did it not come to them before that all the boy needed was kindness and interest?

Yet his service towards the boy had not been recognised, and Mr. Darrell knew that it would not be. Sir Thomas Brodie was not the man to say: "My son is fond of you, you have been successful with him and you must stay." And though the chaplain and the librarian and the doctor were friendly enough and invited him to share their smokings and drinkings and card-playings, still Mr. Darrell was acutely aware that they would sacrifice nothing to be friends with him. But if he should in any way offend or become useless he might be turned away at a minute's notice for all the protests they would put in on his behalf.

Harriet! The name came suddenly on to his lips—he had kept her out of his thoughts and speculations with such painful earnestness, and there suddenly was the name on his lips. How far had he got in any knowledge of her? Twice a day they sat together for lessons, and her silence seemed now less dull and clouded. She spoke more naturally, certainly she was more at ease in his presence. But she had admitted him to no friendship or confidence—why, indeed, should he have expected it?

Twice within the last few days she had received Daniel Steele; he had seen them together, walking on the terrace, she so slight and small in her grey pelisse that she had seemed part of the twilight atmosphere as she had bidden her promised lover "good-bye," and he robust and ruddy, earnestly kind, carefully tender in his look and speech.

Mr. Darrell had heard her refer to her marriage with Daniel Steele in the presence of the governess

and her sister. And the boy had mentioned it, too. Harriet was to be married at Christmas, when she was quite well again. There would be two festivals in one, and he, the boy, was to wear a sword for the first time. "And I hope you'll wear that I gave you, sir. I never see you with it."

Harry Brodie's words came sharply into the man's weary mind. He rose, went to the huge wardrobe and took out the sword, remembering how the boy had brought it to him in the middle of the night and how he had thought when he had opened the door on that figure in the white gown that it was a fantasmal creature. These recollections and the sound of the rain, which was like an incantation on the window, brought his emotions to an almost intolerable point.

"I ought not to disturb her, I ought not to think about her. It is all a delusion and an invention, it is not she whom I thought I saw in the mirror; no, it is not she. And I might as well forget it, I might as well amuse myself with her sister. Yes," he muttered with the sword in his hand, staring down at the crimson scabbard with the long gilt tassels, "why don't I amuse myself with Flora Brodie? She is only a silly little vixen and I can easily be her master after all."

He thought of the bright young woman as she had stood at the Wishing Gate and his lip lifted. He could so easily play the game to which she had invited him, yes, and perhaps win the stakes, too. At least he could get some advantage out of that play. He could so use her, so manœuvre her that he need never return to the bleak poverty and the dull emptiness where he had been before. He could contrive that what she had begun as an amusement she should continue in all seriousness.

There was no need whatever for him to consider her or to pity her or to think of such foolish terms as chivalry or honour in connection with Flora Brodie.

There were thoughts in his mind then that he knew he should have feared. He thought of how he, so poor, despised in this strange and ostentatious establishment, could use a woman's foolishness to bring havoc on them all. How little they guessed, any of them! No doubt they thought him, with his mean clothes, most of which were plain and some of which were threadbare, insignificant. No doubt none of them saw in his lean dark face and spare figure anything to attract any woman.

Henry Darrell flung the sword down on the bed. It was late in the night, he supposed—the clock had stopped, and time with it, it seemed to him. He sat down by the table in the corner, twitched off the goatskin case from the travelling mirror, and stared into it, his face propped in his long fingers, his hair loose over his hands.

When he had first entered the room he had placed his candles carefully, as if he were preparing a ritual, behind the mirror, four of them grouped together. But he had forgotten to snuff them and the flames, orange and long, ended in a trail of smoke. There was very little light in the mirror, but there seemed a trembling over the unequal surface as if a light wind disturbed a spread of water. He thought of the black tarn—how curious that Flora Brodie at that moment should have seen a rainbow, or, whether she had seen it or not, have spoken of a rainbow. What had been in her mind?

If he knew an incantation now, he believed that he could do it—almost he had done it before. It was only because he was so deeply conscious of his extraordinary power that he had restrained himself; he had heard peculiar things when he was abroad, seen them too. He had long been aware that he, who had little else, had this gift, but he had been afraid to exercise it lest it might be entirely evil.

He resisted no longer. There was something touching in the silence of the room, in the blurred darkness of the mirror surface, in the patter of the rain without; the scene appeared set for a tender romance. All the young man's complicated ponderings were merged in a great simplicity. With an unconquerable tremor in his voice he asked:

"Is it you, is it Harriet? Why don't you come; I want you to come."

His voice sounded odd and thin in his own ears; he was afraid of it and became silent. The flare of the unsnuffed candles behind the mirror disturbed him; he rose like one performing a mechanical duty, found the snuffers, cut down the wicks, and returned to his place. By an immense effort he kept his self-control—nothing was in the mirror, nothing.

He reached out behind it, took one of the candles in his hand and raised it up so that the flame was reflected directly in the depths of the glass. Yet still there was nothing, nothing but the reflection of the wavering flame and no more. What did he expect? He set the candle down.

"If I continue like this I shall lose the command of my senses." He murmured again: "I ought not to do it," and sank back into his chair,

having placed the candle directly at the side of the mirror.

He was conscious that the rain had ceased, the silence in the room was undisturbed save by the occasional fall of an ember from the log that was consuming slowly on the wide hearth. Yes, he could hear as slight a sound as that—the fall of an ember, even of an ash; so acute had become his senses and so fine his perception that he believed he could have heard the sound of melting foam on the shore or the flutter of a butterfly that rose and sank from poppy to poppy in the corn.

These two pictures obtruded into his drowsy, half-slumbering consciousness—the field of corn, blue flowers, and poppies half-way up the dry, yellowing grain, and overhead an azure blur. Then the seashore with the foam languidly breaking on firm sands baked white and crystal-sparkling. The thin, almost transparent leaves of the poppies fell apart in the corn, the stealthy foam was for ever dissolving. Suppose the innocent beauty that his fancy could bring as consolation to his deeply perturbed mind ended in but an image of change and decay?

He sighed, opened his eyes, and looked again in the mirror. Nothing!

But at that moment there was a tap on the door. He sprang to his feet, fully roused; it was the boy again, it must be much the same hour as that at which he had come before. How odd that to-night he should have brought out the sword and laid it on the bed. He put his hand over his heart and felt it beating quick and hard. He did not remember having noticed that thump in his breast before, not even when he had been lying on the ground on the outskirts of a battle, waiting for the

signal to take his place in the danger. He said quietly:

"Harry! is it you? Come in."

The knocking continued, and Mr. Darrell became aware that his voice must have been far too low to penetrate the thick door. So, he remembered, it had been on that other occasion—the boy had not heard him. "Poor child! it is a cold, even a frosty night, and he will be chilled. I will bring him to the fire and warm him."

The knocking did not cease; it seemed to rap out a little melody in tones almost sad. The man went slowly to the door and opened it wide and stood looking, all pretence at self-deception vanished, at the creature whom he had evoked.

It was Harriet Brodie who stood there in the white gown in which he had seen her in her bed, with the little jacket of pale wool and the cap tied under her chin with saffron-coloured strings. The dull, overcast expression which disfigured her delicate features by day was gone; she held her head high and smiled.

"You called me. See, I have come as quickly as I could."

Her voice was a breath, a whisper; he scarcely knew if he had heard it or if these were merely the words he had expected her to say, willed her to say, lying in his own brain. He leant against the lintel of the door without speaking, afraid of what he had done, but triumphant too.

He did not know if she could see him or not—she looked straight ahead of her, yet with no ghastly stare but rather with a tender expectancy.

"Do you know me?" he murmured. "And this room and where you are?"

She did not answer but passed him with a movement so sudden and so incredible a lightness that he drew his breath sharply, for he thought for a moment that she really was a disembodied spirit, there was something so ethereal about her delicacy, the quickness of her movements, that uptilted face, the long hands, the pale smooth hair that hung beneath the little cap with the crocus-coloured ribbons. She passed to the hearth, and he thought she was peering into the black tarnished mirror that hung almost in total darkness now, for his candles were grouped round that other glass on the table in the corner.

He closed the door and went, he knew not how, to her side and took her hand and found it quite cold. She was still looking into the mirror and speaking to herself like someone conning over a lesson.

"Sit down and warm yourself, dear."

"You have been such a long time," she answered, still without looking at him. "So this is where they hid the mirror. I never knew."

"This is a dream," he whispered, trying to silence the clamouring conscience that spoilt this moment for him. "Do you understand, a dream! You will go back to bed and never think of it again."

"She is asleep," he told himself harshly. "She is nervous, unsettled in her mind, unhappy, too. I expect she has done this before and no one has cared to tell me of it." And he thought with a hideous sense of shame and a disdain of all the world. "What if she should be missed and followed here? What if her sister should come to know of this?"

These worldly apprehensions had broken in

upon and marred his joy. He had returned, shivering, from the warm world of his fancy. She seemed to feel the breaking of his mood—the lovely look of trust and pleasure trembled, vanished from her face. She sighed, drooped her head, and began nervously to interlace her fingers.

How like a child she was in this attire, she looked no older than her brother, and so frail. . . . He almost exclaimed aloud in anguish as he thought by how slight a chance she remained on earth. The harsh wind, a sudden shock, too fierce a sun, some hazard of illness, and she would be gone for ever from him to rest with her mother in the monstrous brick tomb in the little wood where the dead leaves of the oak trees must even now be beaten down by transient gusts of rain on to the wet walls of the mausoleum. She sighed again, then he asked:

“What is hurting you, Harriet, what is troubling you, dear?”

Then he wished that he had not attracted attention to himself. He was afraid that if she were to awake suddenly and realise where she was she would be frightened and still more alarmed by seeing him in poor, workaday clothes, with his fallen dark locks, his lean, sombre face and his gloomy eyes. And he turned away, ashamed.

With that withdrawal of his presence the girl seemed lost. She moved in a fumbling way towards the bed and grasped hold of the fold of the soft curtains, and he looked at her shyly over his shoulder. He remembered how the boy had stood there, and he thought, half insantly: “If I were to go up to her now and take her in my arms and kiss her she would awake and know me, and we should be united for ever.”

Harriet Brodie murmured to herself, passed her fingers up and down the curtain, and seemed, he thought, to be fumbling and searching for someone. He watched her, dumb with passion, and forwent his moment.

After a while she sighed again and turned to the door. He snatched up a candle and followed her, his strained senses noted how the candle flame blew out like a little banner and how acrid the smoke of it was in the nostrils. But he need not have concerned himself to guide her; as he peered down the corridor after her he saw her taking, straight and deliberate, the way to her room. How clearly he could recall traversing it with the boy the night he had brought him the sword, the first night he had passed in Criffel Hall.

He lost her for a second or so in the shadows, then observed her come out where a little night-lamp was set high in a niche in the wall. Then she had turned the corner and was gone.

"Even now," he thought in weary triumph, "I could call her back. Even now I could make her come to me and stay here as long as I wish."

But he mastered himself, went into his room and closed the door, put out all the candles, and in the dark discounted his supreme loss, his ridiculous failure at the moment of success. He began to rail at himself for a fool and a coward.

"Is not this something stronger than all their conventions, rigid moralities, and all their money and possessions? Why was I brought here, if not to meet her? How do I know that she has not seen me in her mirror, as I, before God, saw her in mine?"

He rose and, moving in the dark to the window,

threw it open to the wind which gushed cool out of the night. A slight rain was falling again; he believed he could smell gorse and heather and wet bracken. The darkness was oppressive; again he thought of cloths drawn over the heavens.

How beautiful she was! and none save himself knew that. He thought of shells, faintly the colour of pearls, of golden flowers.

"Ah, well!" he closed his eyes and deliberately broke his dream. His heart shrank hard and cold with a pain that was physical. "It was a lovely thing to have seen," he said deliberately to himself, "but it is over and it must not be seen again. In the morning, as soon as it is light, I'll break the mirror. Yes, smash it on the hearth. There won't be so very much of it when it's in strands, and I'll send it away with some of the torn papers and rubbish when the maid clears the room. I dare say some giggling servant will say something about seven years' misfortune——" he checked himself abruptly. "I am thinking nonsense. I must leave her alone, I must not in any way disturb her."

Yet underneath the reasoning that he strove to make so cool and sane was the triumphant sense of his power. He could, when he wished, summon her; he could, when he liked, call her to him, and she would obey.

Had he not known it from the first moment that he had seen her? Was it not because of the power that he had over her that she had sat down on the terrace steps, shaking her head gently to and fro, refusing to marry the good, kind fellow of whom she was fond? Fond? Yes. But his feelings went beyond fondness or affection or tenderness.

His soul was weary in his trembling body, he wanted to flee, he wanted to sleep—nothing but that, sleep—and oblivion. But before this dark comfort came there was a resolve to make. He must put aside his wild fancies, his perhaps unholy powers, he must leave her undisturbed to fulfil her human destiny. Perhaps he ought to go away—what did it matter that he had nowhere to go? He could pick up a living somewhere as he had done before. But he shirked this issue, became evasive with himself.

“I ought to stay till she is safe and happy. I will keep myself carefully in the background, she will scarcely know of my existence. Why, when I give her those lessons I might not be there for all she is aware of me. I must use every endeavour to see that she is married to Daniel Steele.”

On this stern thought his mind relaxed. He found his way to the old chair with the worn armorial bearings on the back, and presently he slept.

When he woke, his haggard eyes went at once to the mirror on the table in the corner. He rose and stared into it. It reflected a corner of the bed hangings, with the fox-red acorns, the harsh green oak leaves, the smooth coverlet, a corner of the undisturbed pillow, and himself with his drawn and dark face, and nothing else.

“I said that I’d smash it, break it into a hundred pieces.”

He looked at the hearth, over which the grey ash was lightly spread, but he made no movement to destroy the mirror. Instead, with great tenderness, he put it into the worn goatskin case, then laid it in the bottom drawer of the bureau,

turned the key on it, and slipped this in an inner pocket of his coat.

"Heaven's own key," he smiled to himself then. "It's all right, dear, it's all right. I shan't disturb you again."

CHAPTER XV

HE feared that the next morning she would not appear at her lessons but that there would be instead the not-infrequent excuse that she was ill and would keep her chamber. But to his deep joy she came ready to the appointed time, hand-in-hand with her brother. They were playing with a little dog whose lead, a blue ribbon, was fastened to her sash, and they were laughing at the animal's gambols. And, with a thankful relief, the tutor observed that she seemed more light and gay than he had ever known her. "Perhaps, too, she remembers something and is pleased with it," he thought.

He kept himself carefully to the lessons, that reading in poetry which brother and sister shared and which he contrived, somehow, to make entertaining. As he sat between them with the book in his hand he hardly looked at the girl at all; it was the boy to whom he spoke. So far did he carry his reticence that once or twice, to his dismay, he found himself saying: "Harry, tell your sister this," or "Harry, explain that to your sister," but neither of them seemed to notice the strangeness of this.

He told himself: "It will be easier to-morrow, when I have forgotten a little, then I shall be able to look at her, to speak to her naturally. It is clear that she remembers enough to make her happier, but not enough to recall that it was I."

Flora Brodie interrupted the lessons. She wore

a gown with a great quantity of silver braid on it, and went to the great fire on the wide hearth so that reflections glittered up and down on her loops and flounces.

"Daniel is here, Harriet," she said, "and I think you should stop those foolish lessons and go down to him. I think he wants you to go riding, it is quite fine and agreeable after all that rain last night."

The tutor shaded his face with his hand and held his glance on the book before him. The rain last night!—he seemed to hear the beat of it on the window again in his ears, to feel again the wet wind gushing in through the open window when he had stood in the dark after she had gone.

"You seem in very high spirits this morning, Harriet," added Flora. "I hope this is really the end of your moods and tantrums. It isn't at all fair on Daniel the way you've been behaving."

"May we not finish the lesson?" asked the boy. "I don't work so well when Harriet isn't here," and he ventured, with a half-timid defiance, "I do wish, Flora, you wouldn't always come interrupting the lessons. You've got your own hours to read with Mr. Darrell."

Flora laughed, flashing, amused.

"What do you say, sir?" she asked the tutor. "Do I interrupt?"

He closed the book without looking up.

"No, indeed, for it is over now."

Harry, with a pout, swung the celestial globe in its heavy wooden frame. Mr. Darrell, looking sideways at him, was reminded of Harriet's gesture. It was almost the first lesson he had given her, was it not, when she had turned aside and so

swung round the constellations, the ogres, and the comets painted on the shiny yellow varnished paper, under her small hand?

"Well, Harriet," said Flora impatiently, "why don't you say whether you will go or not? How long do you think that Daniel is to wait your pleasure?"

The tutor was silent, putting away his books. Looking down on the table he could see the girl's fingers resting on the sheet of paper on which she had been writing. Her sleeves were very long and little frills of cambric came round her knuckles. He was thinking of those chill fingers last night which had lightly and for such a transient second rested in his own. He expected her to go without a word, her obedience to her sister was usually docile and silent, but instead she spoke directly to him.

"Shall I go?" she asked.

He did not dare to answer nor to look at her, and Flora came in swiftly with:

"Of course you may go; there is no need to ask Mr. Darrell. I have told you to go. Why do you hesitate and make such a pother, you stupid girl?"

Harriet took no notice of this. She repeated insistently:

"Shall I go? Do you want me to ride with Daniel?" She ignored the others, her brother and her half-sister, as if they were not in the room, and spoke to the tutor clearly and directly as if her actions depended entirely upon his will. So he answered her, in a low tone and still without looking up from his book, which, however, he no longer saw.

"Yes, I think you should go. I will see you this afternoon."

At that she turned swiftly and left the room. He looked up then and saw her passing out of the door as last night he had seen her turning round the bend of the corridor underneath the night-lamp in the niche.

"Why did she ask you that?" demanded Flora. "Permission? From you? And you gave it as if it were quite natural."

"I am your sister's tutor, Miss Brodie, and I suppose it *was* natural that she should ask my leave."

"But I never heard her do it before. She is changed to-day, too, and so are you—something is altered about both of you."

She swung out her great skirts, glittering all their braid before the fire, and then caught them up. There was something absurd in this ostentatious dress, in the country, and in the morning; she was at her worst—vulgar and noisy. Her very brilliancy of colouring and glance was garish.

"Why do you smile?" she demanded, coming to the table and staring at the tutor with her restless, roving eyes.

"Did I smile? I suppose it was because I was thinking it strange that you should take enough interest in me to notice if I were changed or no."

"Harriet is to be married at Christmas," she said. "Won't you miss your docile pupil?"

"I will stay and look after your brother until he goes to school if your father wishes it, Miss Brodie."

"Oh, yes," cried Harry, "Mr. Darrell must stay. You wouldn't interfere with that, would you, Flora?"

Miss Brodie put her hand to her forehead and impatiently pushed up her heavy, rich curls.

"I don't know what I might do, or what I might interfere with. Why don't you go riding with Harriet? I'm sure Daniel would be glad to have you?"

"Yes, I'll go, if Mr. Darrell may come, too."

"Mr. Darrell is his own master," sneered Flora. "Surely you know that."

"Go downstairs and speak to Mr. Steele for me," said the tutor quietly, "he will be pleased to see you, Harry. And tell him that your sister is coming and it won't be long before she is ready. And perhaps I shall join you presently."

As the child ran out of the room, Miss Brodie said imperiously:

"You take the airs of a master here; you seem very sure of yourself. Or is it," she added on a provoking note, "merely that you think you are sure of me? In either case I assure you you are mistaken."

He could scarcely keep back the words "I was not thinking of you at all, nor of myself," but could achieve no more than some mechanical response to her wilfulness. He turned to leave, but she was before him; he endeavoured to evade her, but she was in his arms, her hands were on the lapels of his coat and she cried with a passion half-womanly, half-childish:

"Don't be foolish," her voice was low and husky. "We waste time, you must understand. You're tormenting me, aren't you, just for the sake of it?"

She was sweet-savoured, so suddenly in his arms and he had been long lonely; a glossy tress of her brown hair touched his cheek as he moved

her head on his shoulder. He had not thought she was so tall.

"Oh, Miss Brodie, this is a silly sport!"

He tried to treat her like a froward child, but she was heavy in his arms and would not move.

"Do you want me to be like Harriet and ask permission for everything I do? Well, I will, if you wish. Does not that please you? Am I not to have any compliment for that? Will you not at least tell me that I am graceful and pretty and very agreeable when I am in love?"

"It is no matter to me, Miss Brodie, whether you are agreeable or not."

He laughed in spite of himself, there was something engaging about her reckless candour, about her shameless assumption of dove-like innocence, in the cooing, caressing voice with which she addressed him, the poor tutor, who had heard her hard metallic tones when she addressed those whom she disliked.

He bent to kiss her and have done with it, but she held him close as if much in earnest, tangling the dark hair on the nape of his neck in her insistent fingers.

"I love you, Henry, and you love me." She repeated the words she had used on the edge of the lonely tarn. "I think you have behaved very well, too, and I should like to thank you for that."

"How otherwise could I have behaved, you foolish creature?"

"Well, you might have boasted or let people see there was something between us. Harry is very sharp like the half-witted often are."

"Pray, don't call your brother that——"

"Ah, that is one of the things I must not do, one of your first commands, is it?" He felt her

bosom heave against his breast. "You don't wear a sword," she said, drooping her cheek on his shoulder, "I must get you one. Will you accept that from me—a present to make up for my rudeness when I first saw you and sneered at you because you had no weapon? That was only to attract your attention, of course, you understand that?"

"I have a sword, Miss Brodie, but I keep it upstairs. It would be foolish for me to wear it in my position. Now, what do you want me to do?"

"You asked me that before," she said with some impatience, and with some distress too, he thought. "Haven't you found out the answer yet?"

She moved swiftly away from him and began pacing up and down the room, her features slightly distorted. He thought: "If she is in earnest, what shall I do?" The sound of her quick pacing disturbed him, as did the swish of her stiff silk dress, the gleam of all that silver on the borders of the flounce. A wintry sunshine was falling through the high window and the beams of this mingled with the flickering glow of the flames on her swiftly moving figure.

"If you are to stay in this house," she cried, "you must be at least civil to me."

It was like a threat, and so he took it. He tried immediately to come to terms with himself. Supposing she did send him away, what then? Had he not decided last night that it was about the best that could happen? He would be free then from all conflict, all temptations. It was a mere excuse to tell himself that he ought to remain there until Harriet was safely married. She did not need

him, what use was his protection to her? The boy, too, would forget.

Yet he knew, even as thus carefully reasoned with himself, that he had not the courage to go. Aloud he muttered:

"You must turn me out if you will; you have the power, I suppose."

"Ah, yes, I have the power," she sneered, "and you are too much a man of honour to go to my father and tell him the truth. Besides," she added superbly, "it would make no difference if you did. He would not blame me; he knows that I am not ashamed of my fancies."

She came quickly up to him again and held her brilliant face near his haggard cheek.

"I wonder if you are the man for whom I have been waiting? I wonder if I am truly in love with you? And should one care? You please me."

"You speak like a queen to her subject, Miss Brodie, and I suppose that is not an ill picture of our respective positions."

She looked at him with her eyes half-closed and her lips drawn to a thin line.

"Kiss me, Harry," she demanded.

He obeyed her, not totally unmoved, yet his whole spirit was with Harriet—Harriet, who would be downstairs now in her grey riding-habit, with the green plume in her broad-leaved hat, talking to her betrothed lover, her future husband who would soon have all of her. He kissed Flora again—it mattered so little what he did . . . as if all the heavy pompous walls were transparent, he saw Harriet, light as thistledown on her bay mare, riding away beside her lover. Flora said sulkily:

"You're thinking of another woman all the

time," as she flung away. "Take care if it's Harriet."

He was deeply concerned, for not only was it odiously painful to him to have his secrets thus deftly touched upon, but he believed that this fantastic, passionate, and unscrupulous creature was perilous.

CHAPTER XVI

FOR days it rained out of a perpetual mist that blotted the landscape, and for days Henry Darrell held his fortunes in the balance, calculating his words, his looks, his gestures and actions so that they weighed neither this way nor that but held him negative on a non-committal course.

He knew that this could not long continue, and it would not have continued so long, he thought, had it not been for the strange patience and forbearance of Flora Brodie. At times he was alarmed by her easy silence, by the absence of any advances on her part. He thought it more likely that she would be cruel than magnanimous; perhaps she was merely watching and waiting, and the thought of this was odious to his dreamy, independent spirit.

Even in his own pleasant chamber when he sat alone in his nightly vigil he seemed conscious of the presence of the flashing, flaunting woman, troubled by the swish of her brilliant skirts, the flash of her arrogant eyes, the curl of her lustrous lips. She came between him and that other to whom he had given everything he had to give.

He behaved himself with a circumspection that amounted to a negation of everything that made life endurable. His one indulgence was the key of the bottom drawer that held the mirror in the goatskin case; he kept that always in his pocket and often in the tedious, monotonous days put his

hand on it. That was his one treasure, his one symbol of power.

His only comfort and anodyne was the company of the boy. He avoided Harriet; he put her out of his mind and tried to put her out of his soul so that she seemed to recede into that remote world from which he had once, with such cruel daring, summoned her. She came more seldom to the lessons, but he made no protest. Madame Duchène told him that she had thrown off the long languors of her strange and wasting illness and she was restored to health and spirits and even looking forward with some childish pleasure to her marriage at Christmas.

With such cheap and commonplace phrases they seemed to fence him from her, but he made no protest. He had promised not to vex her, he who had nothing to give beyond what he had already given. How could he undertake to make her happy, even for half an hour? With the other man she might endure an almost unblemished felicity.

He avoided now his chamber in the evenings; there were no more vigils for him, listening to the rain or the wind, shifting the candles here and there, glancing into the mirror. Even that blotched glass above the chimney-piece was forbidden to him; every day, as soon as the servants had finished with his room, he covered it up with an old, faded red scarf that he had worn at the wars. He did not wish to see the reflection of his own face in that room, nay, nor anywhere.

The evenings he spent in company with the chaplain, or the librarian, or the doctor, listening to their ribald gossip and their stale talk, or played

with them for small stakes with their packs of greasy cards, sitting with them in the room with the coarse lamplight and thick tobacco smoke. He joined in their chaff, their jokes, their complainings and protests against the fate that had sent them to this dull place and against the lethargy that did not permit them to seek their fortunes elsewhere.

They did not find him bad company. He, too, had shrewd comments to make of Sir Thomas Brodie and the household that were not without a bitterness that pleased the mean creatures to whom he spoke. He was glad that they were gross and lewd and hypocrites; their heavy materialism was like a firm barrier between him and what was forbidden.

Yet sometimes even this would not suffice. He would sit back in his chair while they were dealing the cards, with his chin sunk on his breast, and find himself saying in his soul: "Yes, I am here, waiting. How much longer can this go on, love? We're both here, are we not?" And then, when one of his companions spoke to him, he would start and say "Yes?" but not in answer to that speaker.

Sometimes his moods were too strong for him to control, he could not rouse himself to join in the play or the talk or the drinking and smoking, and they would tell him roundly that they thought him "a queerish fellow," and one, no doubt, who had done wild things in his time. He had been to the war, had he not, and bear-led a young lord round Europe? He must have been hard put to it before he'd come to a place like Criffel Hall. And Mr. Bonthron, who was always good-humoured, would say:

"It seems a pity, it seems a waste, sir. And Master Harry so improved in health, they talk of sending him to Eton College. What will you do then?"

Such comments as these would make him remember that their posts were secure and his was not. What would he do—not when Harry went to school but when she was married at Christmas? Perhaps they would let him remain with the boy for a while at least. Would he want to do that, to be near her, sometimes, perhaps, visit her in her own home, perhaps sometimes to meet her riding across the uplands. And when his thoughts came to this point a sense of shuddering horror, almost of physical nausea, would possess him. If she married—(*when* she married, there must be no doubt about it)—and went away, would he still possess that power over her, even when she was another man's wife? He knew he would not have the courage to smash the mirror.

The rain-clouds lifted after long, dull days of vaporous grey, and brother and sister went riding almost every morning with Daniel Steele, and almost every evening he came over to the Hall and sat in that parlour with the starry chandelier where Henry Darrell had had his first meal with her. Yes, while the tutor was with the other dependents of the wasteful establishment, pretending to amuse himself with the card games, pretending to listen to the stupid talk, Daniel Steele was with her in the tall, pale parlour, so warmly lit by the glow of the large fire, holding her silks for her, perhaps, while she sat with embroidery frame, trying to make himself agreeable to Madame Duchène, amusing the boy. What did they talk of? the young man wondered, and what

did she know? Of this world, nothing; of that he was assured; she had grown up apart from everything, reading no books save those from which she learnt, poor child, her stilted lessons, and with no company save that of her malicious sister and the indifferent, selfish governess, and the casual association with her inferiors. No, with neither company nor love, save that tender and peculiar affection that she had for her brother. He saw these two as being closed away in a world of their own—a world of dreams, and shadows, and memories, of so many things half understood, and so many things half seen from which he had dared to summon her. Yes, it was certain that of this earth she knew nothing and she might have been for ignorance a novice from a convent.

But what did she know of other spheres and adventures far beyond those of every day? She had not recognised him at least, of that he was assured, yet whenever he saw her—and that was now as seldom as he could make it—she would ask his permission for this and that with that curious air of pure earnestness. She had asked his permission the day after she had come to his room, to ride with Daniel Steele. If he chanced to meet her on the terrace steps when she returned from her ride she would pause and look at him and say: "May I come in now? Have I been out long enough?" And if he met her on the stairs or in a passage, she would pause and ask: "I was going to read" or "I was going to sew, may I do so?"

No one seemed to notice this submission, which was given without fear or question, save Flora, and she made no comment. But when she chanced to be there when her sister turned to the tutor with

these requests on her lips, she would give him a glance which told she was hoarding all up in her heart.

He knew what he ought to have done. He ought to have told her that she was free, that it was no business of his how she spent her time, for he was scarcely even now the pretence of a master. The lessons were over, they had always been a farce, something to distract her when she was ill. But now she was well and going to be married at Christmas and there would be a great festival. Yes, he ought to have told her that, but he did nothing of the kind. He accepted her submission gravely and he always inclined his head and looked straight into her eyes, so crystal bright, and gave his permission as if she were his, anxious and humble to do his bidding. And was she not his, his love and his life?

Once it chanced that he met her with Daniel Steele, walking up and down the terrace in the last light of the brief winter afternoon. She seemed to be quite happy with her lover, on whose arm she was leaning, but Mr. Darrell thought that she looked so slight and childlike that it seemed unnatural, even horrible, to think of her approaching marriage. He had turned aside when he saw the couple approaching, hoping that they would not speak to him, but Harriet had observed him and asked at once:

"May I stay out here a little longer? It is not really cold yet."

Though he knew what he should have said, what he replied was:

"No. But you should have your cloak lined with fur. I will get it for you."

He went into the house and fetched the garment. When he brought it out Mr. Steele remarked pleasantly:

"You have taught Harriet to be very obedient to her tutor."

"Forgive me," said Mr. Darrell, not looking at either of them, "it is her gentle nature, you understand."

Why had he spoken those words when he knew that Daniel Steele understood nothing? The good-humoured young man answered:

"Forgive? Why, that's the wrong word. I'm glad of all the pains and trouble you've been at with Harriet when she was not well, and Harry's grateful too. The lad looks a different being. I hope you're not leaving—they talk of sending the boy to school."

"I don't know. I haven't thought." He spoke of a random thought that had come into his mind. "Perhaps they might let me take Harry abroad. I've had some experience at that. Of course, he's young."

He remembered how glibly and foolishly he had gone on talking, standing there before them on the terrace, the slight girl leaning on the stout, ruddy young man's arm, her face half-hidden by the sweep of the great collar of fox fur.

Ah, well, what did it matter whether he went or stayed? Life would always be utter loneliness. He felt composed, with himself well in hand. He had believed he could endure it, when one day she had said to him, as she had come into the candlelit room where he was reading with Harry:

"There is something I can't remember, and I ought to remember it. It is wrong to forget."

Over the boy's head he asked quickly:

"Does that trouble you?" and she had passed her hand over her forehead with a look of distress.

Miss Flora had followed her, she had been in the room almost immediately, and the moment had passed. But it had broken down the young man's hard-won control.

That night when he was in his chamber he again took the key from his pocket, unlocked the drawer in the bureau, fetched the mirror from the goat-skin case.

CHAPTER XVII

HE had many props with which to support himself in what he was doing, many specious consolations to uphold him.

"This is the last time, dear, only to make sure, to say good-bye."

And he wondered how often that excuse had been given for a reckless and desperate action—To say "good-bye" in a worldly sense—they had scarcely met. If there were any other way of seeing her he would not do it, but there was none. Besides, she did not know him in the common light of day with ordinary people about—he remembered that she had not known him even so when he had summoned her to his chamber. But to-night she might.

He stared into the mirror and persuaded himself that there was a faint ripple of light on the undulating surface. He had decided as to the future; he would remain here during the winter, but when the spring came—not the northern spring, but the southern spring—and that would be early in the year, he would persuade Sir Thomas Brodie to allow him to take the boy abroad.

He would go to Rome. Strange that he could remember now nothing of Rome save the large lilies that grew there that made all the other lilies insignificant in comparison. Yes, he would take the boy there, he would be his constant companion, he would never let him out of his sight,

so that when he looked at him he would remember his sister. She would write to the boy and the boy would write to her and that would be a link between them.

"Oh, is this love," he sighed to himself, "or something more?"

He supplicated her, sitting taut with clasped hands, staring into the mirror. There was nothing, no tap on the door. And then he sprang up, remembering that at all costs he must prevent that. He was sane again—it must not happen.

He took up the little lamp he had asked to be given him, for the candlelight had begun to torment him, and went to the door, walking steadily, forcing himself to look out. If by some wild and lovely chance she were coming he would see that she returned at once. He feared, he hoped—he could not name the mingled emotion that tore him—that she might be coming. He had foreborne her so long and he had pleaded so hard.

With unconscious caution he turned the handle slowly, entered the corridor, and, holding his lamp high, looked down it. And there she was, standing in that other light of the nightlamp in the niche in the wall. She must have been waiting for him, perhaps every night she had been waiting for him. She had not taken off the dress which he had seen her wear that evening.

She had been seated then, waiting for him, perhaps every night like that, and when he had ceased to summon her, had broken the spell, or charm, or whatever it might be, by going to the door; she had paused, lost, like one who in the dark suddenly misses a guide, a familiar hand, a dear voice.

Her eyes were open and her lips parted; he

could see that though she was some paces away from him, and a profundity of grief clouded her childish features.

"Harriet," he said, "you must go back."

He had said these words in so low a whisper that he was certain she could not hear; he would go up to her, turn her round, perhaps lead her to her own chamber.

As he moved another figure came round the corner. It was Flora, with a scarf of bright taffeta round her shoulders. She took her sister instantly by the hand.

"Don't!" he cried out sharply, forgetting everything, even the shock of the discovery in his fear for Harriet, "You mustn't wake her suddenly. Take care."

Flora came towards him, drawing the unresisting Harriet with her quick, hushed movement.

"It is too late to take care," she said, "for you."

She had taken the precaution to lower her voice for fear of the sleeping household, but her tone was distinct and her face was vivid with rage or some passion that seemed stronger than rage. The young man's dreams and his exaltation vanished and left him extremely desolate. But with swift precision he began to explain himself.

He had thought he had heard a step; he had gone to the door. Miss Harriet was asleep.

She brushed aside his flat, conventional phrases. "How dull and stupid you are, Mr. Darrell. I should have thought one engaged on this manner of work would have been more adroit. And Harriet, too . . ."

"Don't speak her name," he asked in anguish, "she might wake."

"She is awake now, she is pretending. I knew this was going on. And she so sly and mincing, with her airs and prim affectations——"

"Hush! For God's sake, Miss Brodie, do not raise your voice so loud—someone will hear and there will be a scandal."

She checked herself at that and he guessed the vile thought that had given her self-control—while this secret was hers she had power, as soon as anyone else knew it her power would be shared. And that reflection brought also a certain consolation to him. If there was no witness save herself to this lovely, sad mischance, well, it would be but his word against hers. He believed he could lie her out of countenance, mistress of the house and termagant as she might be.

"Have a care for your sister," he said sternly, for Harriet, her small hand still in her sister's grasp, was leaning against the wall as if half-unconscious. "You know the state of her health. She is unconscious."

Flora's low, gross laugh made a ribald joke of this, gave the sickening flavour of a camp joke to his words.

"How often has she been here before, Mr. Brodie, pray?"

"Take her to her room, I say; I'll answer nothing."

"Oh, you play the master! like you do with her! She is shameless. I heard her asking you may she do this and that—your permission indeed!" The words came hot and angry into the darkness.

"Miss Brodie, again I charge you, cease this talk here and now. Tell me what you will in the

morning, I am at your disposal, almost at your mercy. But now, look, your sister is sinking."

Flora Brodie looked without pity at the girl who was sinking against the wall, breathing heavily, her eyes closing, her head falling.

"Take the lamp," said Henry Darrell, thrusting this into Flora Brodie's free hand. As her fingers closed on this mechanically he took hold of Harriet, raised her up and supported her in his arms. How light she was, like a bird, like a flower. . . .

She was now more unconscious than she had been when she had left her room to obey his summons; he had such a terror that her life was ebbing away through the shock of this sudden interruption, and that through his fault the sweet soul of which he was enamoured was escaping through the body that he adored. And he had to bite his lips to keep back a cry of anguish.

Flora flickered the lamp to and fro so that the light was across her sister's face.

"She is ill, Miss Brodie, don't you see? You should get her to bed, you should have the doctor. Find some brandy."

"Lover's tricks," sneered Flora, without moving, "do you think I don't understand?"

"I know you don't understand." He turned down the corridor.

"Ah! you know where her room is, as well as she knew where yours was."

"I'll swear to you if you like that she's never spoken to me alone. I've never seen her save in the public rooms of this house, or riding with Mr. Steele or her brother."

Flora, pacing beside him holding the lamp, shrugged her shoulders under the taffeta scarf,

and he knew that she thought he was lying, and in a sense he was. It was true, no doubt, that he had not spoken directly to Harriet in words, but there were other ways in which they had communicated.

Supporting one sister, and with the other walking beside him, he came to the door of her room. He wanted to call the doctor, the housekeeper, servants, but he did not dare to do so for he did not trust Flora. It were almost better that Harriet died than she should become the centre of a wild, grotesque scandal.

Harriet had roused herself now, and moved away from him. A puzzled look passed over her face, she sighed, put her hand to her forehead and stared from the hard angry face of her sister to the profoundly troubled countenance of Henry Darrell. She seemed about to speak, but no words came; then she turned and passed into her room, leaving the door open behind her.

"She is recovering," breathed the young man in a low, strong voice. "She does not know what has happened, and, of course, you will never tell her."

"Take your lamp and return to your room, Mr. Darrell. I shall decide what I shall do. It is all in my hands, as I suppose, since my father is ill and takes no interest in anything."

"There is nothing to leave in anyone's hands; you are utterly mistaken. You tried to fasten this on me from the first. I don't know what your intention is, but I'll not be a party to any trick. I will not be involved."

He had taken the lamp from her and they stood close together in the cold corridor, speaking in low tones, remembering caution even in their deep

anger. His fury had now mounted higher than hers and overwhelmed even her flaring temper.

"You'll behave yourself, you'll leave this alone. I'll have no lies or inventions."

Flora Brodie's reply to this was so unexpected that it left him standing mute, with an air of defeat.

"As if," she whispered carefully, "I had not seen her letters!"

"Her letters? What has that to do with it?"

"Her letters to you, of course. I don't know if she's been able to get them delivered, but it seems to me when you meet like this at night you would scarcely need notes. But she writes them. And her drawings—the two 'H's' interlaced, eh?"

"How do you know this? Where have you found these things?"

"She is simple-minded, is she not? I have to keep a watch on her. It is better for me to do it than Madame Duchène."

"You mean, you've been spying, stealing things for her, looking into her desk, her portfolio?" The thought was unbearable; it was as if he had seen something exquisite, holy, profaned by gross fingers.

He turned away sharply, quenched the lamp, leaving them both in darkness. He heard Miss Flora Brodie exclaim and fumble after him, but he took no heed of her; he gained his own chamber and bolted the door.

Her letters, her drawing of devices! Underneath the shame and the anguish, the terror for her in the future, was an unspeakable delight. Perhaps it had been a lie to tempt and trap him, to force him into some confession. A bold, shame-

less, reckless creature ! How was it possible that these two were sisters ? Yet perhaps it was not a lie.

He locked away the mirror once more and flung the key of the drawer into the bottom of his wardrobe. He spent the night in suspense and apprehension, in a mingling delight and despair that was a frenzy.

He left his room early on the first excuse of the winter dawn. But she had been before him. He had scarcely reached the library when a servant overtook him. A note from her—his dismissal, expressed in formal terms. Sir Thomas would dispense with his services ; he had a week in which to leave the house.

CHAPTER XVIII

HENRY DARRELL was at first inclined to accept this abrupt and ugly solution to his problem. Why not go and have done with it? In doing so he would relieve Harriet Brodie from all possible harm or trouble, from his presence, from her sister's malice. Also he would end his own doubts and confusions. He knew, peremptory and absurd as the dismissal sent him by Flora Brodie was, that he could leave the house without scandal or comment, without the following of greedy eyes, or the licking of slander-ing lips. They were used, in that wasteful establishment, to swift comings and goings, and they had, no doubt, all of them expected that he, who fitted so strangely into his ambient, would have long since left.

It was only the child who would grieve for him—poor Harry, whom he had brought a little out of his lethargy and his resigned timidity. And she—Harriet, herself—she would not miss him, for she scarcely knew that he was there. He had not succeeded in lifting the veil that hung between them. But he was aware of her, acutely now, in every nerve, as she was not yet aware of him. Better that she should never be, for he had nothing to offer but the impossible.

What did it matter what his loss might be if she were safe enough? It did not hurt him to contemplate bending to Miss Brodie's malicious commands; her pettiness had no power to stir his anger.

He returned to his room and put together his belongings, carefully laying the mirror at the bottom of his valise.

"It is better that I should go. I cannot be other than I am, I cannot for ever be masked and disguised, every word and look and gesture a lie."

He was grateful for Daniel Steele, a man whom he could trust, yes, even with Harriet Brodie. He believed that her marriage would change her, that she would, once she became the mate and lover of another man, no longer appear in his mirror, not even as the shadow of a shadow, the dream of a dream, and that he himself would lose all power over her. Once she was Daniel Steele's wife, once he himself had left her home, well, it were better perhaps to smash the mirror. But not now, not now.

Then it came on him suddenly, with a great obstinacy, that he would not go. His place was here as a sentinel over her fortunes until she was secure in her new life, until all the rage and vindictiveness and threat of Flora Brodie was as nothing, but vain and frail to be swept aside without comment.

So he took his clothes from the valise, set the mirror again on the corner. He was relieved for his own sake not to be leaving the pleasant room and the bed with the twill curtains with the fox-red acorns and the bright green leaves, and the deep *garde-robe* where lay the sword the boy had brought him the first night he had spent in Criffel Hall.

It was half an hour before his lesson was due; probably he had no need to consider that. Flora Brodie would tell the brother and sister that there

would be no more readings with an unsatisfactory master. Without troubling himself about this, Mr. Darrell went to Sir Thomas Brodie's apartment and with that quiet, authoritative insistence that was never without its effect, he got past the lacqueys and Mr. Bonthron and the doctor, who was in attendance, and found himself allowed to wait in the baronet's ante-chamber.

When, after a long delay, his employer came in, a sick man wrapped in a gorgeous chamber-gown and leaning on a stick, the tutor was not perturbed at all by the flare of rage that met him. He waited until the futile anger had flamed away, until Sir Thomas had talked out his resentment of this early disturbance and had sunk down at last into a great chair, breathing heavily, his face purple, the veins standing out on his forehead, his flaccid cheeks glistening with sweat.

"I should not have disturbed you, Sir Thomas, for anything but an immediate necessity." He held out Flora Brodie's note. "Has this been sent at your command? Does it meet with your approval? Say 'yes' or 'no,' sir, and I will trouble you no further."

The sight of his daughter's handwriting seemed to anger Sir Thomas all the more, and, leaning forward in his chair, he snatched it with a burst of evil language, abusing all—his dependents, his servants, his children who gave him this pother for nothing.

Mr. Darrell took no more heed of this abuse than if it had been courtesies, but waited for his orders.

"Am I to leave, Sir Thomas? That is what I desire to know."

"Why should you leave? Are you to kill me

among you? Doesn't everybody tell me that I've got to be careful, and am I not plagued and tormented at every turn? What's the quarrel between you and Flora?"

The tutor was relieved that Sir Thomas so hurried on with his complainings and protests that there was no occasion to answer this dangerous question. He pressed his point, taking advantage of the other man's slothful selfishness and gross self-absorption.

"I think, sir, I have been able to please and interest Master Harry. I flatter myself that he will be a little sorry if I were to leave, and suddenly. I should like to stay if I might, until the spring."

"Well, why shouldn't you, why shouldn't you?" roared the baronet. "What's this got to do with the women, anyway? I don't want the boy on my hands, no, nor on Bonthron's either—he is helping me with the medals. We're rearranging them, making a new catalogue. Besides, if the child's happy with you, isn't that enough? Stay as long as you like. Have you got any complaints or whinings? What's the matter with you? Don't you get paid enough? You can't say that I've interfered with you."

"Miss Brodie, sir, does not approve of my method of work with Master Harry and his sister. She has taken it upon herself to dismiss me. Is it your wish that I should remain, sir? I hope that you will say so."

"Afraid of her rough tongue, eh?" said the baronet with a loose smile. "Well, as I told you before, she isn't mistress here yet. Tell her to get on with her sister's marriage—she's got her hands full with all the arrangements about that. Tell

her to be careful and look out she don't give too much trouble. She ought to have had her lesson by now, she ought to remember what happens to spitfires. She's got her own goods to bring to market and she's made a slip or two already for all her airs and her wits and her cleverness."

There was a malicious glint in his eye as he spoke, and Mr. Darrell had the impression that he disliked his elder daughter intensely.

"Tell her," the old man emphasised sulkily, "that she is not mistress here yet and she hasn't got her mother's fortune either. Tell her there are not many men who would live with her for all her money and her looks."

The tutor could not forbear a smile.

"I can scarcely give such messages to Miss Brodie, sir. And, of course, I know nothing about her affairs."

"It is just as well," said Sir Thomas with a leer, "it's just as well. You won't be making mischief then."

"You can trust me for that, sir. All I ask is that you should let your pleasure be known—that I should remain."

"Yes, yes, I'll do that. Bonthron shall do that, or Moffatt. I'll tell them that she's to leave you alone, too, as long as the boy's happy with you."

The tutor thought that he would press his advantage and seize an opportunity that might not come again. He was encouraged by success and his hidden love gave him an inner strength. He said firmly:

"I thought of asking you if I might take Master Harry abroad in the spring, I mean, when it will be spring in the south, sir—that should be February, I think. I know the child's young, but

it would be nothing to you to send a retinue with him. And I doubt if he's strong enough in mind or body for college."

The baronet looked at him shrewdly, with the sharp attention of a man attracted by a new idea.

"Well, I might think of it. Bonthron might go with you. There'll be a collection of Greek coins for sale in Florence next spring, I believe—one of the German princes, in secret. . . . Yes, I might send him with you to have a look at them, perhaps to bring them back. We'll see, we'll see. At least, you'll stay till then, and I don't want to hear any more about it."

He waved his hand in abrupt dismissal, and Henry Darrell, not in the least offended at being treated like a lesser servant, left the room.

He had easily obtained what he had desired, and now the triumph seemed flat and stale. Why, after all, should he want to remain? He had nothing left to love and he could not, must not, nurse back to life a hope that he himself had slain. What was hidden must never come into the open; he must be very much on guard with himself so that she was not disturbed by a look or a gesture, and all the while there would be Flora's evil scrutiny over them, there would be her intolerable and ridiculous and nauseous jealousy to assuage.

He lifted his shoulders as he thought to himself there would be only one way to ease her gross suspicion, only one means by which he could prove to her satisfaction that he was not the lover of Harriet, and that would be by becoming *her* lover.

He went into the parlour. It was a misty day and the light was grey in the tall closet. Master Harry was there with his books, but, as he had

feared, there was an excuse for his sister. She was not well: she still slept.

He shuddered, for it was as if he saw her slipping away into remote regions where he could never follow her, even before his eyes, and he had a cruel difficulty in concentrating on the lesson. And the boy, too, seemed tired and distracted; Mr. Darrell had noted before that there was an acute sympathy between him and his sister, almost as if they were twins, some affinity held them both in the same mood. When Harriet was ailing Harry would be dull and dispirited.

So, after a while he made no more attempt with lessons, but flung the books down and, taking the boy's frail hands in his, asked:

"Would you like to come away with me, Harry, to the South—somewhere to these places that we read about and that seem nothing at all in books but are really there all the time—cities and gardens and towers and churches?"

"With you? Oh, sir, I should like it above everything."

"Yes, I think it would please you, Harry. You could get away from the winter. It would still be winter here, you know, quite for a long time, but where we should go there would be the almond blossoms and the peaches and the roses, with daisies and violets and narcissus out on the plains. And you could go riding in the sunshine and sleep in a room that would be full of sunshine too."

There was no mistaking the child's ardent pleasure.

"Oh, sir, I should like it above everything. Can we not go at once?"

"No, Harry, it is too early in the year yet. If we were to go now we should find it winter."

"But not a winter like this?" said the child eagerly.

"No, not quite, Harry, but still, we must wait."

"Will Harriet come too?" asked the boy.

The tutor began to put away the books.

"Your sister is going to be married. I thought, maybe for that reason, you would like to go away. I thought you would not miss her so much if you were travelling."

"You'll miss her too, sir, won't you?" asked the boy.

The tutor turned his melancholy dark eyes on him.

"What makes you say that? I have seen so little of Miss Harriet."

"Oh, I don't know. I thought you'd miss her and that she'd miss you. But she'll be happy, don't you think, married to Daniel Steele?"

"Yes, I do think so, Harry. And we ought to be happy too, thinking of it."

"It's going to be a grand wedding this time, not a poor affair like the last, which wasn't a wedding at all. I shall wear a sword, you know, and I hope you'll wear yours, sir—the one I gave you."

"Yes, I'll wear it, Harry, if that means any pleasure to you."

Mr. Darrell felt happy in the atmosphere of the boy's happiness. His mind was eased by the resolution he had taken to remain; in overcoming Flora's violent and crude methods to be rid of him, he felt that he had overcome invisible enemies more potent than the haughty woman. And to a certain extent he had overcome himself; he felt now sure of his own control and no longer afraid of anyone in Criffel Hall.

He had found, on a close inspection, what a poor thing Sir Thomas was—an ill, ageing man, kept alive by drink and flattery and the false interest of a foolish hobby.

Yet all was clearly decided now. He would remain where he was at his post, quite remote from Harriet, yet watchful over her happiness until she was away, safe in the repose of her own home. Then he would take the boy with him to Italy.

With his arm resting on the back of Harry Brodie's chair while the child chattered on, full of this new excitement, forgetful of his books, forgetful of the ride that had been promised to-day, the tutor's mind was away on the coming spring. The child would grow and flourish in Italy, he would expand in the sweet southern sunshine. And he, Henry Darrell, for her sake, would see that it was so.

He would make of him a man who would be able to enjoy life and the great estates that one day, perhaps quite soon, would be his. They would ride together over the Campagna, they would see the cyclamen and violets blooming on the Alban Hills. And one day he would take in his pocket the little travelling mirror in the goatskin case, and when the child's attention was engaged elsewhere, he would drop it in the fathomless black depths of one of the Roman lakes and there would be an end of everything save a chill memory. Yet not, he thought, an end of his deep tenderness. That, surely, would encompass her always, even when she had forgotten his name, even when she could not recall that she had ever met him and was wrapped close and securely in homely love and the warm dear affections of every day.

From these reveries the tutor was roused by the boy's voice saying, keenly:

"Do you remember, Mr. Darrell, the first day I saw you? We were friends even then, were we not, though we did not speak, and I drew the three 'H's' on the margin of Harriet's book."

The tutor stared. The boy had started a train of thought that ended in a desperate pang. Whence had come his sense of security?—letters Flora Brodie had spoken of, papers, verses and drawings. Why, if that were true, she had in her possession a most potent weapon with which she could at any moment ruin the gossamer web of Harriet's frail happiness.

Supposing the girl, scarcely knowing what she did, nay, not in the least knowing what she did, had written some such letters, or some verses, or some sentences, a line or two on the margin of her exercise book, a couplet or so on the verge of a sheet of sketching paper? Why, Flora, who was so bold and clever and unscrupulous, had only to alter it a little, put a name that might be his name, and what had she—— Mr. Darrell could not stifle an exclamation of dismay, which caused the boy to look at him with sad wonder. He was so used to being checked in his delights.

"Have you thought of something, sir, which means that we cannot go after all?"

"No, no, Harry," said the unfortunate man, rising, "I did not think of that. I believe we can go. No, indeed, something else came into my mind, but it is nothing."

The boy returned eagerly to his own pleasure.

"Shall we ride to-day? There was a little snow last night, but I don't think there's been much of a

frost. We could go a little way anyhow, through the park, couldn't we?"

"Yes, Harry, but not this morning, as I think. Let us go this afternoon. See, there is a little sun, it will be stronger then."

The tutor continued to speak, scarcely knowing what words left his lips, while he was turning over in his mind, "What has she got? What will she do? Supposing she were to show those letters to her father, to Moffatt, or Bonthron, to that odious governess, some detestable servant? Supposing"—and his heart became pinched with distress—"she were to show them to Daniel Steele?"

He put his hand before his eyes, scarcely able to endure his thoughts. He saw Harriet, who had, with so much difficulty, accepted a delicate and evasive happiness but a real and permanent security, suddenly torn from both felicity and repose, like a bud as yet unformed may be torn by a rough, cruel hand from its protecting sheath and flung out into the cold to die. So he saw Harriet, exposed to talk and slander, to rumour, to scolding, to scorn, even to disgrace.

"I must prevent this," the man almost muttered the words aloud, so strong was the force of his resolution. "But how? I have no single friend. How can I induce that woman, who will be further inflamed against me by my resolution to remain?"

He bit his lip to force his control.

"Harry, put up your books. We will ride this afternoon; this morning you can go and shoot at the butts I made you in the long gallery."

"Will you come too, sir?"

"No, I can't, Harry. There are one or two

things I have to do—accounts and reports to be got ready for your father, and—and—your last exercise to correct. Nay, run along, child, I will come, but presently.”

It hurt him to dismiss the boy, for he did not care to rebuff any manifestation of this much-desired and highly-valued affection. But he was almost distracted by the memory of Flora Brodie's threat. He could not rest until he had found and faced that angry young woman.

Yet, when the child had gone and all the day lay before him, he knew not what to do, but stood inert and powerless, as one who gives the reins to his destiny. To threaten her, to cajole her, to even—this idea came to him—make a confidant of Daniel Steele, an honourable man, he was sure—and yet how impossible this course was!

Without knowing where he went and scarcely what he did, the tutor left the house, crossed the terraces on which there was a light rime of snow—how bitter was this northern winter! he shivered in his thin overcoat—and passed down the wide steps where he had first seen her seated in her bridal gown, and came out by the lead fountain. This no longer played, there was no splash of water in the basin, which was covered by a thin film of ice, little scrolls of broken frost hung over the lip, the great lead fish curled its useless length upward into the sky and the gaping mouth from which the fountain used to break had a fine beard of rime.

There was a shudder in the air, there was no warmth in the pale sunshine, the tutor's ill-clad figure was dark like the rest of the landscape. He was almost amazed at the cruelty of his own situation; he would not have felt so distressed if he could have been sure . . . perhaps she had

merely lied, tormented to provoke from him some scene of temper or agitation. If that were so and she saw the least sign of uneasiness on his part, she would continue and redouble her lies.

Should he go to Harriet herself? Should he try to discover some delicate and roundabout means of ascertaining if what Flora had said was true? He knew as soon as the question was formed that this would be impossible. How disturb the delicacy of their almost intangible relationship by such a harsh and crude interlude!

He began to walk away across the park, he had no duties to perform, and if he had had he did not care if they were neglected or no. The snow had melted on the paths and on the bitten winter grass, save directly under the trees where, in the shadow of the trunks, the patches of white yet lingered.

It seemed to him, turning the dismal situation over in his mind, that his best hope lay in Daniel Steele, and, as this germ of consolation quickened in his soul, he hurried his pace, remembering that Mr. Steele's house was not so far away. It seemed, indeed, a short distance on horseback, but even on foot he might be there by the squire's dinner hour. Yes, without revealing anything of the ugly scene of last night, without saying a word of the dismissal that Flora had sent him or the threats she had made, he believed he could move Daniel Steele to take the action that would save them all.

He turned into the little wood, now bare of leaves where the brick mausoleum stood up stark in the winter desolation and seemed so much larger than he had remembered it. As he passed he pulled off his hat and let the little bitter wind play upon his forehead and the long locks of dark hair that, escaping from the careless knot of ribbon,

hung either side of his worn face. And the odd reflection came to him with a touch of strange pleasure, "When she dies, she won't lie there. She'll be with the Steeles in the church, not in this forlorn loneliness."

The way seemed so much longer than he had thought; he kept reminding himself that he had been on horseback before and had had the boy's company. But at last he was there, turning in the handsome gates of scrolled iron which he had thought so modest and insignificant compared with the magnificent entrance to Criffel Hall.

He was dismayed to find many signs of activity. There were servants about, horses and a light carriage waiting, and everywhere an atmosphere of homely bustle. Of course, it was natural, the young man had his relations and friends staying with him, people who had been invited to his marriage. And it was agreeable, after the artificial existence of the great Hall, after the listless crowd of servants and parasites, after the idle, wasteful grandeur of that hateful place, to come upon this busy, cheerful household. Yet it made his task more difficult; all the careful, ambiguous, and yet appealing and poignant speeches that he had been preparing since after he had passed the mausoleum, went from his mind. It would, of course, after all, be impossible to speak to Mr. Steele about Harriet.

But he forced himself, the movement being, as it seemed to him, almost against his own volition, up the steps, under the pleasant white portico, and struck at the door. And when it was opened to him he asked in tones that sounded to himself grotesquely strained and unnatural if he might have half an hour of the squire's time.

He was instantly admitted and shown into the comfortable, handsome parlour where he had before been with Harry Brodie. After the briefest of intervals, Mr. Steele was with him and he could see by the alarmed look on the ruddy face that his sudden appearance had been taken as a portent of disaster. He became ashamed of his own self-absorption which had led him to a cruel indiscretion.

"Mr. Steele, don't be distressed, sir, pray don't. I bring no bad news from the Hall, everyone is well."

He saw the comely features of the young squire relax as he replied with an embarrassed smile:

"One lives in a constant state of apprehension, and this unexpected visit——" he paused for the explanation, and Mr. Darrell found it almost impossible to give. Perturbed and anxious, Daniel Steele said, "You look exhausted, sir. You've walked—Harry isn't with you, for it would be too far for the boy."

"No, no. I came by myself. Indeed, I must confess that I left the house without thinking of this visit. I was rather at a loss, sir, and then it came to me that you . . . You see, I've no friends, or even a close acquaintance here."

"I can stand in the position of either, Mr. Darrell."

"Yes, I know. That's why I came."

But still he could not explain himself but must stand like a fool in the window-place, staring out at the dovecote which rose clearly against the wintry blue, but round which no doves, no pigeons, circled, staring out at the garden which he had last seen full of opulent flowers and which now showed nothing but the turned earth and the dried

stems and sprigs of bushes, with here and there the cloudy grey of lavender.

The other man took the situation in hand and spoke with a force of which Mr. Darrell had not suspected him.

"You have something on your mind, sir, and it concerns me. I conjure you to speak. What occurs at the Hall—remember, I am seldom there, and then only formally for half an hour or so, for they do not seem to much welcome my company. There must be much you know that I do not."

"If there were," replied the tutor in a low voice, "I could scarcely come here to chatter it to you. I must remember that, I must not be either a spy or a tale-bearer."

"Let that go," replied Mr. Steele strongly. "You came here on some errand and as it is to me that you turned in your distress——"

"Distress!" interrupted the tutor. "Did I say distress?"

"You did not need to say it, sir, I saw it in your face." And he repeated firmly, with a look that was almost stern in his clear grey eyes, "As you have come to me, I take it this distress concerns Miss Harriet Brodie."

"And if it did," muttered the tutor, almost beside himself, "should I tell it to you, ought I tell it to you?"

"What doubt can there be of that, sir? I am her future husband, and if she cares for any she cares for me."

"Ay, if she cares for any. But I think she has no affection towards any earthly creature, although she has a kindness for all."

Mr. Steele turned to the long, dark bureau, opened this, took out a bottle of spirits, and

poured some into a tumbler which he offered to the tutor, who stood with the heavy cut-glass in his hand, not drinking.

"I don't need this, sir, though I thank you."

"Drink it. I can see you are under some strain or tension. Drink it, it will loosen your tongue if it does nothing else. Do not, for God's sake, be held back by any consideration of what you ought to say or what you ought not to say. Don't you suppose I am aware of something of what is going on in Criffel Hall, what is said to Harriet and her brother? Consider my position," continued the young man with increasing earnestness, while the ruddy colour slowly sunk from his face, leaving it strained and pallid, "yes, sir, consider my position. When my mother lived and my sister it was more or less easy, but since their death and the growing up of Miss Flora Brodie, I have been cut off. And I loved her, sir, indeed, from the first, and you know one doesn't say that word easily, but I can and do of her. It has always been so, even when they told me her mind was deranged I did not care. I would have brought her here even if she had not known me, and looked after her as if she had been my own kin."

"She knows nothing," said the tutor, "indeed she knows nothing. She is so untouched."

"Is that your trouble?" said Mr. Steele with a faint smile. "Don't you think I am conscious of her heart and soul? I shall be married to her and we shall have God's blessing on us. But if she wishes, she shall not be here as my wife, she'll be quite free. I think she will be happier than where she is now, nay, I *know* she will be. My cousin, who is a dear woman, will stay with us a while."

"I did not come to speak of that," said the

tuor, deeply touched, "I have never thought for one moment that she would not be entirely safe in your hands."

"I thank you at least for that," said Mr. Steele. His voice had a queer edge to it; he turned again to the bureau and helped himself to a glass of the brandy while Mr. Darrell never noticed how he had betrayed himself by the fervour with which he said, "I always thought that she was safe in your hands," as if he, Henry Darrell, the poor, beggarly, threadbare tutor had been her guardian.

But the young esquire had noticed it and he spoke not with less kindness but with more reserve, and he turned a keener curiosity than he had ever used before on the tall, dark, broad-shouldered young man whose eyes seemed so deep and stormy, whose face was stern with some carefully controlled emotion, whose words were so broken and in a fashion meaningless.

"I've nothing to say," said Henry Darrell at last, "I'd better go back. It was only a thought that came into my mind, although I live in much company I am greatly alone, really. You see there is no one to whom I can speak."

"You can speak to me here and now. You have something in your heart and what it is you must and shall reveal. Mr. Darrell, I am a man of sense, and, I hope, of feeling and you cannot deceive me as if I were a boy or a fool. What has happened?—something you thought it was your duty to tell me?"

"No, not my duty, Mr. Steele. My duty did not enter into it. It was something I thought that perhaps your friendship— Here—it is put in so many words—must you wait for Christmas? must you wait for all this pomp and festival?"

"Harriet is happy?"

"Yes, I think I can say that," said the tutor, earnestly. "There is a lightness in her step and in her eye—forgive me, sir, I forgot what I was saying—I see so little of her, really. But I think she is much fatigued in heart and mind, and if—Why, I believe when you were to have married her before when her illness broke it off, it was to be private and sudden—a ceremony at the chapel?"

"Yes, no more," replied Mr. Steele quietly, "and no more this time, except that they make it one with the Christmas festival. But what do you mean? Explain yourself, sir. Yet I don't think you can—shall I help you? You have come here to suggest that I marry Harriet Brodie almost immediately, is not that so?"

The tutor gave a sigh of relief.

"Yes, that's really what I came for. I've nothing to say, except that I think . . ." and he put a great and passionate force into the words ". . . I think, sir, that she would be happier and safer with you."

"Safer?" said Mr. Steele, with emphasis.

"Yes. You say you know something of that household, then you must know that there are people in it who are not to be trusted."

"Her father?"

"I had an occasion to interview him this morning. He is a man not to be relied on, any one can twist him this way and that. I expect that his affairs are in great confusion. . . ."

"I have suspected that myself," put in Mr. Steele dryly, "I think that he has not a quarter of the wealth he is reputed to have, that all goes in waste and follies. I know from my actual experience that he is cheated, his farms are in a dis-

graceful state. But if you came to warn me of this, sir, it was kind but needless. I do not expect a portion with Harriet."

"I did not think you did," replied the tutor simply, "but it was not that, I only gave it as an instance. What was I saying—the old man was incapable, and Miss Flora Brodie——" he could get no farther than that name. Mr. Steele finished for him quickly:

"Miss Flora Brodie rules all, she is not to be trusted. You've heard tales of her, I suppose, they'd scarcely be kept from you even in her own household."

"I've heard a hint from her own father—yes, he told me this morning, that she has had—oh, I don't know how he put it—her adventures. But what's that to me!" exclaimed the tutor wildly. "She is here now, and means to divert herself, as I suppose."

"Yes, what will she do to 'divert herself?'" demanded Mr. Steele. "Torment her sister, is that it? Vex the boy to annoy Harriet?"

"Something of the kind," replied the tutor. "I think the girl should be got away—there's no one there, you see, no one. The governess is a sly and artful woman and Flora's bought her. Indeed, she's bought the whole house, I think, and though they like Miss Harriet for her kindness, there's no one who would dare to do anything for her except myself. And you must see, sir, too well my position."

"Yes. Forgive me, Mr. Darrell, but you always seemed to be a strange man for such a post. I thank you, I thank you from my heart a thousand times for your warning. There is indeed no reason why I should not marry Harriet immediately. I

think she will give me her consent now. And as I told you," added the young man with a wistful frankness, "her life need not be any different because she is my wife, and I will not keep her here unless she wishes to stay. I thought of taking her away for the rest of the winter—to the south perhaps."

"The south," repeated Mr. Darrell, with an intolerable pang of yearning.

"Why not?" replied Mr. Steele, curious as to what the note in the tutor's voice meant. "It is true I am a home-keeping man, but I went abroad for a couple of years after I left college, and liked it well enough. And I thought perhaps France or Italy—why, the poor, sweet child has never been anywhere. They've kept her there through all these ugly grim winters. You do not seem pleased, sir, but was not that what you came to suggest—that I should marry her and take her away and do what I could to change her life?"

"Yes," replied the tutor quietly, "that was indeed what I came to suggest. I've brought no tales," he added, "you will understand that—no tale-bearing, no scandal-mongering. I've not played the spy or the eavesdropper, I've given no confidences away."

"What do you mean, sir?" interrupted the Squire. "You seem in a strong agitation. Did I accuse you of any of these things? You have indeed told me nothing, and yet you have given me to understand much for which I shall be for ever grateful." He held out his fine hand and Mr. Darrell took it.

"If it were any other woman, Mr. Steele, what I have to say would be absurd, but we deal with such a fine creature, a child, one whose very in-

tellect, as it were, is in the balance. I swear to you you'll find no defect there, I've been reading with her for some weeks now. She's painstaking and has an exquisite taste. Her verses are quite pretty, too, and her music——" his voice faltered—there came before his mind Flora's threat, the very core of the purpose of his visit were her verses and her writings, and she had sat up at night penning dear, silly epistles to him. "Oh, I can say no more, Mr. Steele. But take her away! There is no one there who loves her."

"No one?" said Mr. Steele, on a curious note. "Well, I think you're right. I don't suppose the old man will last much longer now—it seemed to me when last I saw him that he was drinking himself to the devil. Then Miss Flora will indeed be mistress. I expect he'll leave her guardian to the boy."

Mr. Darrell did not heed these words, indeed he scarcely listened to them. The object of his visit had been achieved, there was no more to be done. He felt very tired, even the strong spirit had not acted as stimulant. His soul was weary, and the scene about him—the pleasant, handsomely furnished parlour, the well set-up florid young man in his plain, expensive clothes, the sound of the voices and laughter without—all seemed to him unreal. He wanted to be away, to get out of it into the lonely park again, to be alone with his thoughts.

"Good-bye, and thank you," he said abruptly.

He snatched up his hat without waiting for any formal or ceremonious leave-taking from his host, and left the house. Daniel Steele's narrowed, grey glance followed him intently.

CHAPTER XIX

FOR a few days Miss Flora Brodie left the tutor alone. She had done this before—cat and mouse tactics—she was, of course, playing with him. He waited, very wary.

She made no remark on his refusal to accept her orders to leave the house, she had of course heard from Mr. Bonthron that he had been to her father. She gave no sign if she felt chagrin, disappointment, or relief; perhaps, after all, she was pleased that he had remained for her to torment. It would have been rather a flat end to her amusement if he had escaped so soon from her power.

They met before others with casual courtesy; she made no interference between him and his pupils. He still read a little with Harriet and a great deal with Harry, but never since he came to the Hall had he seen so little of the younger sister, for Mr. Steele or his relatives were constantly at the house, and carried the girl, sometimes by herself and sometimes with Madame Duchène away with them in the coach, swearing that it was too cold for riding, to spend the morning or the afternoon or the whole day in her pleasant future home. Nor could the tutor be sorry to see her go—they were such merry, kind women who came to fetch her, so courteous and agreeable, and the girl seemed so at ease in their company. And he could not regret that she had what was at least

a semblance of happiness even though he had no part in it.

He forced himself to be grateful, ay, thankful, that Mr. Steele had so instantly taken his hint, delivered, as he feared, so ambiguously and clumsily, for the tutor learnt from Mr. Bonthron that the marriage had been hastened under an impeccable excuse—Mr. Steele wished the ladies of his family to be present and they must be in their own homes long before Christmas.

Mr. Darrell heard Madame Duchène sneer that this was strange, that the gentlewomen had not thought of it before, that it was remarkable that they had made all arrangements to spend Christmas in the north and then discovered these pressing pledges to their own homes. Miss Flora said nothing.

So far as the tutor knew, Sir Thomas had acquiesced in the change of plan; it certainly would matter very little to him whether his younger daughter was in his great house or no.

Then suddenly there came upon Mr. Darrell the meeting which he had expected but neither dreaded nor desired. He was seated in the deep worn red leather chair by the library fire in a lethargy of mind and body, for he was much wearied and he had sat up late at night for several nights past playing cards, smoking and drinking with the chaplain and Mr. Bonthron, for now less than ever did he desire to pass lonely vigils in his bedchamber. And often he would not go to his room at all but take a little sleep in a chair so that the servants coming to open the shutters in the morning would find him there, sometimes with his head bowed on the table and his long hair falling over his hands, and the candle sunk out on

the pin with the wax twisted in a hard, cold, winding sheet round the stick.

So he sat now, exhausted, cheeks pressed into his palm and his elbows on the arm of the chair staring into the great flames. She and her brother were both abroad with Daniel Steele and his aunt and cousins. He saw pictures of them in his mind being agreeably entertained and kindly treated in the comfortable house over which she was so soon to rule.

He did not know if he would be able to accomplish his desire of going south with the boy. Perhaps it might be in some English water, even in the tarn to which he had ridden with Flora Brodie, that he would throw the mirror, for it must not remain in his possession. This he vowed to himself with his hand over the key of the drawer where he had locked it in his pocket, the mirror must not remain in his possession one moment after she was married to Daniel Steele.

And as he sat thus, his mind like a hollow through which the unbidden thoughts floated in a broken design, the door opened and Flora Brodie entered. As he rose, inclining his head, awaiting her pleasure gravely, she came straight past him and knelt down on the hearth and held out her hands to the flames.

"I have been outside," she said, "and it's cold, I think it's going to snow."

The glow of the steady flames was over it and gave an edging of light to her silken dress, to her light hair, to her vivid face, to the hands held up with fingers thrown outward. She had opened her riding-coat at the neck and her bosom was bare. Still, gravely, the tall dark young man awaited her pleasure.

"Why did you not leave when I sent you away?" she asked, but gently, as if in staying he had indeed given her no offence.

He had no reply, he knew that he might as well save his words, it would be idle to fence with her in formal sentences. Whatever he said or did she would soon come to the core of her actions, so he waited, patiently enough, for indeed his mind was far away. Dangerous she might be, but he did not fear her as he had once; he had put Daniel Steele between himself and her to save his treasure.

She glanced up at him, trying to penetrate the silence which was his answer to her challenge. She held her hands closer before her face, shielding it from the gleam of the fire.

"Well," she said, "you would not go, and perhaps after all I did not want you to go. I may have wished you to know I was mistress, but it seemed I failed there. I never thought," she laughed as if amused, "that you would go to my father—with a tale of me, as I suppose," she added slightly, "of my waywardness and wilfulness, eh? You did not tell him the cause of my behaviour."

Mr. Darrell did not trouble nor deign to defend himself against the accusation.

"I asked Sir Thomas if he would wish me to go or to stay, and he said, 'stay.'"

"Until when?" demanded Flora Brodie.

"Until the spring, at least."

"The spring! Well, that's a long way off."

"I did not think of England or the north, I thought of the south. Almost I have your father's permission to take your brother to Italy."

She looked at him very sharply then—he saw the glint of her eyes above her cheeks, re-

minding him of a little animal suddenly become suspicious and ferocious.

"Italy! with Harry!" She shifted her fine shoulders under the coat. "What made you think of that?" She rose and took the old worn leather chair that he had just left. "What made Daniel want to marry Harriet so much earlier than was planned? Are you at the bottom of that, too?" she frowned.

"Miss Brodie, you flatter me by making me such a deft intriguer. What have I to do with his affairs, why should I have a finger in your family business?"

"Why, indeed?" she replied. Then, at a tangent: "Do you remember the Wishing Gate and what I said there."

"I have tried to forget it but it is true it often comes into my mind."

"It comes into mine," she smiled, "a silly thing, but who knows?" She looked at him with such a brilliancy of malice that he was a little abashed. Then he said: "Daniel Steele is a good fellow. He is a friend of mine, and a gentleman." The accent she gave to this word and the look over the tutor that accompanied it, held the very essence of insult. "Do you know, I think it is dishonourable in me to allow him to marry Harriet. Ah, I moved you in that! But I mean what I say."

"You cannot," replied the tutor in a low tone, "it is impossible that you can mean it."

"Why? Mr. Darrell, you must be vainglorious and ambitious and blinded by a perverse passion. You know my reasons, do you want me to put them into words?"

"No, no!" he said quickly, "For shame's sake, for your sake."

"It is true that it is not a very pretty thing for me to speak of and yet we'd better have it clear between us. I think I ought to tell Daniel Steele before he marries Harriet that she has been, since your residence here, going to and from your chamber at midnight and writing you silly letters and amorous verses."

"Miss Brodie, if you dare to breathe those lies to anyone no one but yourself will be harmed."

At this conventional threat she turned and laughed.

"Yes? I suppose you think that it would be your word against mine as to what truth is there. Yet I think that I could make Daniel believe me."

His panic terror swept him past all prudence. He forgot the restraint that he had decided to impose upon himself, he forgot the indifferent scorn towards this woman to which he had schooled himself. He began to plead with her, turning to where she sat with the air of a suppliant.

"Miss Brodie, I entreat you, I know you speak but out of mischief, at the worst a passing spite, but you are wrong. You know that. Your sister scarcely knows me save as a tutor, a wooden fellow who has corrected her exercises and read her verses with her. Never have we met secretly, never—I can swear it. That time you met her, some hazard of her sickness——"

"Oh, hush," said Miss Brodie, watching his flushing and paling face with a cruel interest, "do not trouble to rehearse these tales on me. Keep them for another audience, maybe you will have to answer to Mr. Steele. Do you think he'll listen long? He is a good swordsman—you'll need the weapon that Harry gave you."

"How do you know that?" he asked. "Then I am a fool to make the demand—the child told you."

"Perhaps he did not, perhaps I overheard her foolish talk when she was half-asleep—the boy was but her messenger. From the first she sent you that earnest of her favours. Ah, I know you think that I am bold and reckless, perhaps you are provincial enough and stupid enough and ill-bred enough to think the less of me because I candidly offered you something more than friendship. But I tell you I am—what you would call 'a good woman' compared to your little pale playmate, who was so ready to slip in and out of your chamber like a village slut."

He put his hand to his eyes and turned aside.

"God forgive you, Miss Brodie, for I never can. But why should I argue with you, it is useless." Then his mood changed and he turned on her violently. "But you have no proof, and anyone who heard you thus speak of your sister would loathe you. Mr. Steele is indeed what you named him just now—a man of honour—he'd not listen."

"Are you so sure?" she asked, not shrinking in the least from his anger, but facing up to him with a brilliant audacity. "Perhaps I could not make my father listen either! And there's Madame Duchène—she's seen and heard things too. She'd swear to anything I did, and I have a servant or two ready. No proof, you say?—but I have her letters. Madame got them out of the little fool's desk when she was not looking—those she never sent, I mean. I suppose there are others that you have safe, unless you had the sense to destroy them."

She turned away quickly, setting her dress, and he noted how her breath came and her colour fluttered in her cheeks. Even through his own storm of emotion he noted this—she was really moved and touched. And he asked with a bitter curiosity:

“What is your count in all this? What pleasure or good does it do you to behave thus?”

She answered him with such force and swiftness that it was like one sword striking on another.

“Did I not say that I loved you and you loved me, and you put it by as if it was nothing, and all the while you preferred, perversely, this pale imbecile to me, Flora Brodie, who is at least a creature of flesh and blood.”

She turned about again, her mouth twisted with pain, and faced him:

“The letters!” she said, “the letters! How do you account for them?”

“Indeed I don’t know.” He thought that surely she must see his sincerity, surely she must realise his ignorance of what she spoke, so much force he strove to put into his words. “Before God in Heaven I do not know. She would have her sweet fancies, no doubt. What could these letters be? They must be innocence itself.”

“There’s your name on them—and hers,” replied Flora sullenly, “with two ‘H’s’ interlaced, and sometimes three.”

“It is but a device she copied from the boy the first time we met.”

“Did she copy from the boy her little phrases, that you were her ‘dear love’ and her ‘only love’ and one for whom she had ‘waited long,’ and some folly about an appointment ‘made beyond the stars’; some childish vow that she would

come to you whenever you called for her, that there was something she ought to remember and that she had forgotten——”

“Stop!” said Henry Darrell, with his face quite distorted, “Stop!” He took Flora Brodie’s wrist in so firm a clasp that she was silent. She watched him keenly, without a second’s relaxing of her attention. “The letters are not written to me nor to any man,” he said.

“But you would give a great deal for them just the same, would you not, Henry Darrell? How much would you give me for them?” She thrust her brilliant face close to his.

“I have nothing to give,” he replied, and indeed his own poverty seemed harsh and stark about him. “You know I’ve nothing to give. But I think if you with your lies, your forgeries, your sly half-truths, and all your petty dangerous malice were to harm her, I’d find some way to bring you where you never thought to be.”

She smiled at his threats.

“Go on, I have at least made you pay attention to me.”

Then he was terribly silent, brooding and staring. She tried to goad him into speech again, force him to finish his menaces and threats.

“What would you do to me, Henry Darrell? What do you think you can do?—a man who doesn’t wear a sword! A man with hardly a guinea in his pocket, with only the few pence that comes from me! Ah! you persuaded my father to keep you, but I could bring him round to another mind if I chose. But I wanted you to stay, for things weren’t finished between us.”

“Nay, and are not yet.”

"Well, perhaps now you believe that I am something more than a chattering woman who is using you for her amusement. You disdained me too quickly, without knowing anything of me."

"I did not disdain you, my mind was set elsewhere."

"Yes, and I know where. Come, what will you give me for her letters? I'll swear you do not only want to destroy them, you want to read them, you want to see what she's said of you. That's true, isn't it?"

She had seen the blood come into his thin cheeks and she smiled with satisfaction.

"I tell you I have nothing to give you." He flung her hands away; there were red marks on her wrists left from his strong fingers and she looked at them curiously. "You've described my estate—a swordless, penniless man, but if you did it, if you disturbed her in her happiness, if you troubled Daniel Steele's perfect trust, I think I should find it in me to kill you some time, some way."

"To kill me!" she seemed more excited than alarmed. She was close to him again, soft as a cat. "Listen to me, Henry, don't be a fool. It seems to me you have understood nothing. I am ready to believe it was all a fancy and her scribblings half-imbecile nonsense——"

"Yes, yes, if you'll only believe that, if you'll only burn those papers and have done with it——"

"Yes, if—— What is your condition?"

"Miss Brodie, you would not have me make conditions?"

"Ah, Miss Brodie this, and Miss Brodie that! You do not say 'I love you'—you let life go by while you dream! Why do I love you, I wonder?"

I'll never have a moment more strange or more sweet than this. Why don't you take my hands again, I don't care if you hurt my wrists."

"Miss Brodie, I don't wish to touch you. Surely all is said now!" He turned away to the window and looked out at the dead landscape. The sky and earth seemed together blank.

Then she was beside him again with her warmth and beauty, and her bounty of passion, her soft hands on his wrist.

"Don't believe I fool or make mischief for a diversion. I said there was another man, but that is gone. I've thought of many things these days. You've had your dreams, I suppose, and I've had mine. Well, look at me—Flora Brodie—not so ill-seeming, I suppose, as fine a woman as another. And I shall have a great deal of money, you can't despise that, it means power."

"Why do you recite your gifts to me, Miss Brodie—well, Flora, if you wish. Flora, why do you tell me all you have?"

"Because, I offer it to you. If you will be my husband you may, I suppose I must take myself to be a queen and you a subject—it is always the queen who asks the man, I think."

There was something noble in her speech and her gesture, and she spoke with a gravity that had a touch of dignity. He could not despise her, even though his thoughts were full of the wrong she had proposed to Harriet. She added gravely:

"Don't say you think I mock, or jest. You know I speak in earnest."

"And in earnest I refuse," he said, "for your sake and mine."

He took her by the shoulders as if he were much her elder and much her master and gave her a

kiss that was both harsh and kind and said strongly:

"Flora! Flora! Think better of all this, think better of me and of yourself."

With no more than that he left her; she made no attempt to follow him or to stay him by a word.

CHAPTER XX

MR. DARRELL realised, with a sense of almost grotesque anger and futility, that the root of his troubles was mean—it was merely poverty. Had he had money, even a small amount of money, had he had an assured position, he would have seen a way out of the entanglement in his affairs.

There was no reason that he should not claim her, no reason why he should not tell her—and how easy it would be to tell her for he had seen her of late looking at him anxiously as if she were awaiting a signal—who he was, only this: he could do nothing for her. If she were to know him and follow him he would reduce this creature, delicate as a harebell, who all her life had known nothing but the enclosed existence of luxury, to a life of precarious adventure which even one coarsened by contact with the world might find rough and rude. But for that he would have taken her away from Criffel Hall, from Daniel Steele, from all of them.

All he wanted, then, to attain his desire was a small amount of money, and the woman who was most intent on frustrating his wishes offered him money—not a paltry sum but more money than he would be able to spend in a whole lifetime. And, as one long placid and patient suddenly turns with a snarl under a constantly applied goad, so Henry Darrell swung with a certain vindictiveness on his fate and asked himself, at the

end of tedious and piteous hours of self-communing: "Supposing I took her at her word? She is wilful enough and infatuate enough and headstrong enough to marry me, ay, would take me, scarecrow as I am, merely as I suppose to flaunt some other man or to assert her independence. Supposing I took her at her word?"

He smiled to himself, knowing that she would do it. She was capable of flouting her father, she had her own money. He knew that the income allowed her from her mother's estate was sufficient to supply her with luxuries and indulgence of whims, and in a few years she would be a very rich woman indeed, even without counting upon the money due to her from her father's estate. And, for all the tutor knew, it might not be in Sir Thomas Brodie's power to cut his daughter off with a shilling, however much she angered him.

"Well, if she's capable of marrying me out of a spurt of temper and a flash of vindictiveness, and God knows what perverse liking, am I not capable of marrying her and breaking her afterwards?"

He saw himself as master of all this property and money, master too of this impetuous and difficult woman. He would then become the natural guardian of the boy—oh, no doubt there would be a host of relatives, a multitude of friends to cry out against him and endeavour to frustrate him at every turn, but he believed he could hold his own.

Harry at least would be pleased, and Harry would soon be a man—and a man in a powerful position.

"I dream," muttered the tutor to himself, as these thoughts oppressed him to the point of fever.

"It is a nightmare. I must go away, yes, I cannot remain here between these two women. I cannot even wait for the spring as I promised Harry."

A dread of being longer alone, a panic terror of drawing the mirror from the goatskin case and setting it up again secretly in his chamber, sent him down to find the company of the librarian and the chaplain. But as he, with downcast head, bent shoulders, and slow steps was approaching the room where they held their amusements, Harry ran after him, flushed from the winter air, with an anxious look in his eyes.

"Ay, Harry," he said, confusedly, called so suddenly from his brooding, "so you have returned from Mr. Steele's. Well, I don't usually see you so late. It's past suppertime, shouldn't you be going to your bed?"

"Yes, soon. But I slipped away, I wanted to speak to you. And there's no one else to whom I can go," added the boy in a lower troubled tone, "and I don't quite know what to do."

Mr. Darrell felt a pang of utter sympathy. This boy, in everything placed so differently from himself, was yet afflicted by the same poignant loneliness.

"Well, Harry, speak to me."

"It's difficult here," objected the boy, "Mr. Bonthron or Mr. Moffatt will be coming out soon."

"It is difficult for us to go anywhere else, Harry. We shall surely be seen, and if this is a secret——"

The boy took the tutor's hand and drew him down the cold corridor to a seldom used room which was filled by rolled tapestries and pictures in their frames standing with their faces to the

wall, and discarded chairs with dirty holland covers.

Mr. Darrell left the door open so that the light from the passage gave a dim illumination to this scene, and taking the boy tenderly and firmly by the shoulder he begged him to make haste in what he had to say. He did not want, though this he did not add in his speech, to be found closeted with the boy, or seeming to intrigue or scheme with him.

"It is only this," said Harry. "I thought you might help me. Harriet is not happy. All to-day when we were with Mr. Steele nothing could make her happy, though she tried to please the others with a smile and tried to be pleasant, of course."

"She is always courteous," said Mr. Darrell in a low voice. "Quick, Harry, tell me why you think your sister is not happy."

"She has lost something. She has a little desk, it is locked up and looks like a box. It was inlaid with bright coloured wood and mother-of-pearl, when you unlocked it and opened it out it made a sloping desk. It was lined with red silk——"

"Yes, Harry, and she kept papers in it?"

"Yes, she had papers—things she'd written herself, I think, I don't know. But she's lost it and she's worried about it. And the worst of it is . . ." the boy stood on tiptoe and brought his delicate face close to the tutor's anxious one " . . . I know where it is! Flora has got it!"

"Go on, Harry, tell me all you know."

"Well, it's only that. We had the desk between us, as it were, I used to put my things in it too. We didn't want Flora to see them so we used to

hide it, but one day she must have found it. When I heard it was gone I thought that she'd got it and I went into her room—you know, where she does her sewing and painting—to look for it. And there it was, not hidden at all, but she was in the next room, in her bedchamber, and she came in on me at once and boxed my ears for an impertinent boy and turned me out. And ever since she keeps her door locked."

The boy's eager eyes searched the man's face in the thick gloom.

"What do you say about it, sir, what shall we do?"

The tutor controlled himself to answer quietly:

"I think it was very wrong of Miss Flora to take the box, though perhaps she has an explanation, and I think we should get it back if we can."

"But how, sir, I don't know how?"

"Nor I either," replied Henry Darrell, almost on a groan. "But run away now, boy."

"Sir, you speak so strangely—you're not angry with me, are you?"

"No, no, indeed. I'm much obliged to you. But if she keeps her door locked and is waiting for you—there's Madame Duchéne, too, I suppose she'll be on guard—and the maids. Has Miss Harriet asked her for the desk?" he added sharply.

"Oh, yes, but she only laughed and told her not to be a fool."

"Well, run away now, Harry, and I will think what I must do." He saw with a pang that the boy was relieved by this half-promise, a pang indeed for he was utterly at a loss.

But when during his card-playing, his smoking, and his idle surface gossip when he exchanged sentences that he scarcely understood in an automatic fashion, he turned the atrocious situation over in his mind, he was half-inclined to risk everything—go himself to Flora's room, take the desk away, and let her do what she might.

But for that evening and the next day he did nothing, and Miss Flora Brodie also held her hand after her manner. The tutor, moving carefully through a sick idleness, saw the boy's eyes, mournful and half-reproachful, turned on him now and then, and he thought there was a trouble in the pure eyes of Harriet—yes, a trouble and an appeal he had not noticed there before. But for himself he had so schooled his emotions that it seemed to him he lived in some lingering dream, in a solitude peopled only by airy fancies, and the coming and going phantoms of the mind.

He drugged himself by his own imagination, he was no longer the prey of forebodings, the future seemed empty, half-defaced, and only the present where all was stagnant about him, was real. What, after all, did it matter? He had waited for her so long, perhaps it might be in another star that they must meet, perhaps they were destined to drift for ever apart. Perhaps this was all but an obscure obsession of his soul, born of his loneliness and his broken life and the solitary hours that he had spent in the midst of action, in the midst of great cities where every man seemed to have a place and an occupation save himself.

Snow fell day after day; a dull, airless world encompassed Criffel Hall. The flakes were noise-

less on the window and piled in drifts on the sill; Mr. Darrell could see the leaden fountain outlined in white. The northern winter, which had closed in with a sense of finality as if it must endure for ever and never give place to spring, seemed a reflex of his mood. He sensed through the enclosing snow the massive outlines of the hills and he shuddered when he thought of the black tarn where he had stood with Flora Brodie, and the Wishing Gate, by the power of which she had evoked all manner of evil on her sister.

He brooded over the effect of the loss of her desk on Harriet. Surely this trouble might bring on a recurrence of her illness, brain fever, delirium, the sleep-walking. Had not this secret pressed away her fragile happiness, poisoning her future with Daniel Steele, that future in which he had seen her so secure? He imagined, too, the scene between the sisters in Harriet's room where the bed stood between the long green curtains, or in Flora's sumptuous boudoir. Would there not be pleadings on one side, refusals on the other, tears and reproaches. And what . . . he pulled himself up sharply . . . what after all, was in the desk? Were the letters to himself? If so, had they any meaning? He believed that they were impersonal, a spirit endeavouring a fumbling communication with spirits. What there might be of precise materialism, had surely been added by the cruel hand of Flora Brodie.

She haunted him, this woman with her brilliant look that was not quite beauty, with her audacity and her clear-headedness. When thinking of her he sometimes felt the blood beat in his cheeks and heart, and even laughed aloud. Passing her in the passage, as he had done once

or twice, since they had spoken together so frankly and so violently, he found himself staring at her with a grin that she returned with no faltering in her stare.

The weather was too rough for any expedition to Daniel Steele's establishment, but the young man came himself frequently to Criffel Hall. The tutor noted that he did not stay long with his future wife, she seemed always to have some excuse for evading him, though she was complacent enough, even merry, in his company, but always there was some reason that she might not stay long.

The tutor sensed the watchfulness of the young Squire, observed how he would look from one face to another when they were gathered together in the parlour with the sparkling chandelier hanging high from the lofty ceiling. He would see his eyes turn to him across the room as if he were endeavouring to gain from a glance or a gesture, or maybe a whispered word, some solution as to the puzzle this establishment at Criffel Hall seemed to be, a puzzle at least to his ingenuousness.

Then Mr. Steele would be taken away to be closeted with the sardonic recluse, Sir Thomas Brodie, and sometimes there were lawyers there too. No doubt there were settlements to be made, deeds to be signed, arrangements to be argued over. Mr. Darrell was rather surprised at this legal business for he thought that this would all have been gone into on the occasion of the former interrupted marriage.

How odd it seemed to hear the women, Madame Duchéne and the maids, ay, and the men, too, even Moffatt and Bonthron and Dr. Hay, chat-

tering about the charming affair the marriage would be this time, ay, for all the wintry weather in the north.

The date of this marriage had been hastened on by a month, it was to take place at the end of November. And sometimes Mr. Darrell found a chance to ask the boy if he knew any more about the desk. But Harry Brodie would shake his head sadly.

"Harriet has said no more about it, and neither has Flora." But he knew that his sister had not got her treasure back.

The tutor said no more of that visionary spring-time travel, of Rome in April, the amber-coloured capitals of the ancient pillars rising above the pasturage where the goats browsed and the shepherds piped, although the boy reminded him timidly and wistfully now and then of these promised and seemingly vanished delights. But he would only nod and smile briefly, caring little now even for the disappointment he inflicted on a child.

It was only a question of marking time, putting through one day and another until she was married and safe in the keeping of Daniel Steele.

CHAPTER XXI

IT was an evening when the snow had ceased and the wind was getting up, strong and insistent, rattling the casement of the large windows, blowing the flames out from the great wood fires, lifting the old arras on the walls of Mr. Darrell's pleasant chamber, when the boy ran in upon him without knocking.

He had no shoes on his feet and so had come without a sound down the passage and Mr. Darrell, in a keen state of nervous tension as he was, sprang up, almost with a look of alarm as if a spirit had run in upon him out of the stormy night.

But the boy was joyous. He stood by the bed with the fox-red acorns and harsh green leaves on the white wool curtains where he had stood when he had run into the room the night of the new tutor's arrival, carrying the sword which Henry Darrell had not yet worn.

"See, I have got it at last!" he placed the box on the coverlet and the tutor snatched up a candle.

It was her desk, a childish affair of piteously small proportions, of delicate workmanship, polished curved wood inset with a pretty inlay—stars of mother-of-pearl.

"Harriet's letters!"

"Yes, I do not know if they are all of them, but I think so. I could not see what was in it, but see, I struck it up with my penknife and the

surface is rather marked. But it can be mended, can it not?"

"Oh, yes, Harry, that can easily be mended. But Miss Flora!—did she see you?"

"No. All these days—it's over a week now, is it not?—I've been watching her for my chance and you see, this evening when we were all in chapel . . ."

"Oh, yes, it is Sunday," said the tutor strangely, like one who rises from a stupor and wonders what day it is, "I'd forgotten."

"Yes, you didn't go to chapel to-day, did you? But what does that matter?—we were all there, and I think she forgot that I knew about the letters. I pretended to be ill, with my head, you know, like I often am, though I've been so much better lately, and Madame Duchêne brought me into the house. She made me lie down on my bed and gave me some drops, then went away and left me. And then I got up and went to Flora's room. It was unlocked for once—wasn't that lucky?—and I looked round everywhere—I had quite a lot of time to myself for Janet, her maid, is out to-day, her father keeps the lodge and she's gone to visit him. And so I found it at last. It was in her *garde-robe*, lying under the folds of a long dress.

"I pulled it out and ran into my own room, took my penknife and broke it, and there were all Harriet's letters—I remember seeing her write them—and verses, they are all tied up with saffron-coloured ribbon—she used to send to York for those by the carrier."

The boy hurried on joyously, but even while he chattered in his relief and triumph he was conscious of a sense of disappointment. The tutor

did not seem to rejoice with the friendly sympathy that he had expected in this piece of good luck. Good luck! "Not," Harry thought proudly, "wholly that." He had used some wit and daring to accomplish his end, about which he had been thinking for weeks.

"You should take this to your sister," sighed Mr. Darrell, "you should not have brought it to me."

"Not have brought it to you, sir? But how could I take it to Harriet, she has only just this moment come in from the evening service."

"Why did she go to-night!" murmured the tutor, "the weather's so wild and cold."

"Somebody down in the village was ill, sir, and they're saying the prayers for them. And Harriet thought she'd like to go and pray too. Well, as I was saying," said the boy, with some impatience, glancing apprehensively over his shoulder, "she's only just come back and Madame Duchéne and Flora are with her, and when shall I get a chance to speak to her again? So I brought the box to you, sir, to hide, for as soon as Flora misses it, of course, she will search in my room and accuse me."

"Yes, yes, Harry, you did quite right. I did not mean what I said just now, I was not thinking. I will hide them, I will put them in my wardrobe here with the sword you brought. Do you remember when you brought me that sword, Harry, the first night that I came to Criffel Hall?"

"Yes, and you've never worn it."

"Never mind, Harry, I'll wear it for your sister's wedding. And you'll wear your new sword, your first sword, is it not?"

The tutor took the box in his hand and turned towards the guardrobe. It was very deep at the bottom and had a substantial lock—here, for the moment at least, he could hide the box. “I ought to throw the key away, like I ought to throw away the key of the drawer where I keep the mirror, so that I shall have no temptation to read what she has written.”

These thoughts had scarcely time to flow into his mind before the door was pushed violently open and Flora Brodie entered, with as much ease and assurance as if she strode into a common room.

“I thought that I should find you here, Harry,” she said swiftly, and her roving eyes went from the boy to the man. “Yes, and I thought I should find that also—the desk, is it not? So you’re a thief, are you?” she cried scornfully.

She put out her hand and flipped the boy’s cheek with the lightest of touches; the words she said and the gesture she made gave it the horror and the menace of a blow.

“This is Miss Harriet’s property,” cried the tutor, “and I think, Miss Flora Brodie, that you have no right to it, nay, nor to be in my room. While I am in your father’s service this is my apartment.”

“How stupid you are,” cried the audacious woman tossing up her head, “how incredibly silly! You employed the child to steal for you, did you?”

“No, indeed,” cried the boy indignantly. “Mr. Darrell doesn’t know anything about it—and it’s not stealing, it’s merely taking back what *you* stole from Harriet.”

"You silly fellow!" said Flora Brodie in a voice that was dangerously silky. "Don't you know that I am the guardian of Harriet, ay, and yours too? That it is within my right and duty to look after you? It was for Harriet's good that I took the desk and it is for her good that I shall keep it. Hand it to me, please, Mr. Darrell, and at once."

"That I refuse to do, Miss Brodie."

They faced each other in full conflict; she had taken the delicate boy by the shoulders and swung him out of her way.

"Leave me alone, Harry, this is my business now. It was very confiding of me to believe in your headache, child. I should have been on guard, but I did not quite guess how sly you were."

"Miss Brodie," said the tutor sternly, "leave this abuse, this vain railing which becomes you but ill, and believe that I shall not relinquish your sister's desk. I will give it to her in your presence."

"I see the lock has been broken," interrupted Flora Brodie vehemently, "give it to me. Have you taken the letters out?—But no, I do not think you had time. As soon as I missed it I guessed the boy had taken it and that he'd bring it here."

"You're very clever, no doubt, Miss Brodie, but your guesses are sometimes wrong. I'll not deliver up this desk."

Harry Brodie had refused to leave the room on Flora's harsh command; he stood inside the door, his breast rising and falling quickly behind his lace cravat, his brilliant eyes narrowed with excitement and passion.

"I wonder to hear you speak so, Flora. You've

always been cruel and unkind, but this is the worst of all. I'll not give way and I'll not go. Mr. Darrell is right—the desk belongs to Harriet and he must keep it until he can return it to her.”

“No,” cried Flora, strongly, “no! Here is property that is stolen out of my room and I demand it, here and now.”

“Hush! for your brother’s sake, Miss Flora, see the excitement he is in.”

“You see, child, did I not tell you to go to your room, to run to Madame Duchéne or Mr. Moffatt?” cried Flora, who was fast losing her dangerous feline control and becoming but a dishevelled, flustered young woman shouting in a temper. But the boy stood his ground.

“I’ll go to neither of them, I’ll go to my father.”

This authority was so seldom evoked in Criffel Hall that both the tutor and Flora Brodie remained confused for an instant.

“After all, I suppose he’s master here, though we don’t often see him and he never interferes with us. I’ll put the case to him, I’ll ask him if Flora has any right to Harriet’s desk.”

“Will you, Harry? Perhaps you’ll ask him if she’s the right to have what she’s got in that desk?”

“I don’t know anything about that,” said the boy obstinately. “The things are hers and you’ve no right to look at them. I, too, hate to have you look at my drawings and writings. Come, Mr. Darrell, wouldn’t that be just and reasonable—to put it all before my father?”

“I think it would,” assented the tutor, who in a swift anguish had calculated which was the lesser of two evils. “I will take the desk to Sir

Thomas and he will decide to whom I am to give it."

"I'll not agree!" cried Flora.

But Harry countered this defiance with another.

"Then I'll tell everyone—Madame Duchéne and Mr. Moffatt, and Dr. Hay and Mr. Bonthron, and everyone in the house—that you stole Harriet's box and won't give it up again."

A light distortion passed over Flora's flustered features. She tried to steady her voice when she said:

"Don't you see how humiliating it is for me, Harry, to plead against this—this man?"

But the boy shook his head.

"Come along at once, I know father's in his cabinet for Daniel went in there just now."

"Then—then need we go?" asked the tutor, to whom this was the worst possible news. "Can't we wait until the morning, Harry? Miss Brodie, do you think it decent to break in on Sir Thomas with this matter now?"

He had made a mistake by showing his reluctance and his distress. Flora Brodie became at once resolute to pursue the matter immediately.

"If you please, Mr. Darrell," she said, "you will follow me to my father's room. I think you know the way there, as you have already been there complaining about me. Follow me?—nay, I think you will walk in front so that I can see you do not endeavour to some destruction on the desk."

CHAPTER XXII

MR. DARRELL waited in the ante-chamber of Sir Thomas Brodie with the sensation of a man who is snared. Flora Brodie sat the other side of the room, seemingly taking no heed of him, but all the while he knew that she was watching him jealously, ready to pounce if he were to touch that broken lock. Beside him sat Harry, heavy with excitement, his eyes brilliant, his cheeks radiant from a hectic flush.

The tutor's position was grotesque as well as odious. How did he know what were the secrets that he had so jealously guarded? There might be anything or nothing in the desk—a few piteous phantasies, a schoolgirl's imaginary love letters, *his* name might be written there, or there might be no name at all. Then again, how uncertain he was as to the attitude of the baronet; this time he, the poor tutor, the unnecessary dependant, might lose the concessions he had won at his last interview, he might be turned at once from the house.

The valet opened the folding doors: Sir Thomas, on Miss Brodie's earnest entreaty, would see the strange trio who had so oddly disturbed him.

They entered the inner chamber, littered with drawers and cases, the shelves loaded with books and catalogues. Sir Thomas was in a flowered bedgown, sitting in a low chair by the fire with one of his gouty feet swathed in cloths propped on a

red stool. His wig hung on a knob of his chair, he had discarded the handkerchief that usually wrapped his head and his forehead and temples showed greasy under the coarse locks of grey hair.

There was a tray of gold coins across his knees, each disc fitting carefully into the smooth velvet setting, and the bright rays of the well-trimmed crystal lamp that stood on the shelf over his head cast thin gleams in and out of the bright gold.

Mr. Daniel Steele had risen from a chair the other side of the hearth as Miss Brodie entered. His face was grave, almost stern, and had lost its usual amiable and carefree expression. He seemed on the alert and was not smoking the long churchwarden he held in his brown hand.

The baronet looked angrily at his daughter and demanded in a voice at once weak and hoarse what play she was about, why she had broken in on him when he was showing his new medals to Daniel Steele?

Flora laughed. She had the air of a woman who would stop at nothing.

"My complaint is soon spoken, sir. This man, this beggarly tutor whom I once dismissed and who cringed round you to remain, sent Harry to my chamber, stealing, if you please, and when I came to regain my property all I received was insolence. It is that desk, and I demand it back."

"That all sounds like a lot of silly rubbish to me," said the baronet sullenly. "Well, Harry, what are you doing here, and what's your tale?"

"Flora's had her say and this is mine," said the boy. "The desk belongs to Harriet, and Flora took it from her. I took it from her room and ran to Mr. Darrell with it—the only place where I thought it would be safe."

Sir Thomas Brodie seemed deeply bewildered and exasperated by these counter charges. His face purpled, then paled to a dusky colour, and his lips worked convulsively. Mr. Darrel exclaimed:

"Have a care, Miss Flora, look to your father."

For answer, Miss Brodie ran across the room and flung herself on her knees by the old man's side, seized his putty hand and began stroking it. Mr. Darrell could only marvel at her effrontery and address. She spoke in a gentle voice as she said:

"Father, how could you disbelieve what I say? You know how naughty and silly Harry is, and as for this man, his insolence has been intolerable. I've only put up with him because you wished him to stay. Just ask him to give me that desk back—I know what I'm about, I've a good reason for wanting it."

The old man did not seem seduced by these beguilements. He looked at the tutor, who had not spoken a word, and at Daniel Steele, who had stood watchful and also silent.

"What's all this rubbish, what's all this nonsense?" he said. "To whom does the desk belong?"

"It is mine," said Flora.

"It belongs to Harriet!" exclaimed Harry in a breath.

"I know it belongs to Harriet," put in Daniel Steele quietly, "I've seen her writing at it in the little room where she used to do her lessons. There was her name cut inside."

"It is there now," said the boy triumphantly.

"But there's something else beside her name,

as I suppose," cried Flora, rising to her feet. "I'm losing patience with all of you. Don't you see I'm trying to keep something from you you'd rather not know? There's silly letters there and stupid verses."

"Whose?" demanded Mr. Steele, and he took a step forward, so quickly that Flora winced back slightly and grasped the arm of her father's chair.

"Harriet's," she replied. "I thought to protect you."

"Protect me from any knowledge of anything that Harriet might have done? What's come over you, Flora, you seem possessed? If those are Harriet's verses and letters they must be returned to her."

"Ah, you are chivalrous. You don't even want to know what's in them nor to whom they're written?"

"Why, I want to know nothing, of course."

"You are right, sir," Mr. Darrell forced himself to speak, "what can there be to know? These are but schoolgirl scribblings, some childish effusion."

"Why are you so quick in her defence?" asked Mr. Steele. "How do you know what's in that desk?"

The tutor stood silent, while Flora Brodie smiled maliciously. But Harry put in:

"He hasn't opened it, Mr. Steele, he's only been carrying it for me. For he's stronger than I," added the boy whimsically, "and Flora might have snatched it from me."

Flora pulled her handkerchief from her bosom and wiped her lips.

"How tamely you are all behaving," she said, looking from one to another, "and how disgrace-

ful this is! Don't you, or won't you, understand? Father, are you going to dismiss him? I've endured a good deal, you know, just because it suits you to live like a recluse with your silly coins."

"My silly coins, girl, what do you mean? And stand out of the way, you'll upset the tray."

"Let me take it from you," said Mr. Steele, "let me put it on the table, sir."

But the old man screamed out and would not give up the glittering medals.

"I don't care what any of you say," he cried, "I only want to be left in peace. I don't know what you mean, Flora, you were always trying to make mischief."

"That's not true!" exclaimed the girl, deeply stung at the accusation. "You don't know anything about me, you're always shut away here."

"Ah! abuse me now, would you? You're a termagant and a vixen, like your mother before you. I tell you you're not mistress here, my lady, not yet. You think you can do anything with me, I know, because I'm old and disable and not interested in you. I don't know what your spite is against this man, but it don't affect me, do you hear that. He stays here until the spring——" the old man's hands rose and fell in feeble blows on the arm of his chair, "he stays here until the spring, I say. And then he's taking Harry abroad. And you keep your sly ways, your vulgar tricks and manners to yourself, do you hear, Flora, do you hear?"

Harry, who had been watching with staring eyes, suddenly turned aside and resting his face against the wall, began to weep. To Mr. Darrell this was an unbearable sight; he turned in-

stinctively and put his hand on the child's shoulder, the disputed desk being under his other arm. Flora watched him, and cried out, cool, though she had whitened under her father's denunciation:

"And what is to become of the desk?"

"That's to go back to Harriet. She's got enough sense to look after her own property, hasn't she?"

"Very well," said Flora, rising with the stealthiness and the light grace of a cat, "but first hadn't you better know—you, father, and you, Daniel—what is in it." She made a plunge at Henry Darrell and snatched the desk, holding it by the lid so that the broken lock flew wide and a few frail bundles of papers and drawings fell to the floor. Before Harry, with the tears glistening on his face, could dart and recover these, Flora had exclaimed: "They're her love letters, father. And they're not written to you, Daniel, but to this rogue here, whom she goes to visit at night."

"It is a lie," said the tutor, and he made a movement as if he would strike her on her twitching mouth.

The words were echoed by Sir Thomas Brodie, who heaved himself up in his invalid chair, a light foam gathered on his lips, and shouted: "It's a lie!"

"Read for yourself and see," shrieked Flora, and stooping down she began to gather up the papers, snatching them from the feeble fingers of the crying child. It was the tutor's intention to seize her by the waist, pick her up, and throw her out of the room and recover the papers him-

self, but he was diverted by a sharp cry from Daniel Steele.

The old man had risen with a movement that sent the tray of coins clattering to the floor. He had thrown up his arms and opened his mouth as if about to make some terrific denunciation, then he had fallen as Mr. Daniel had exclaimed, and lay prone with the gold pieces all scattered about him like a price offered, refused, and flung down.

"Your father! cried Mr. Steele, on his knees by the fallen man. "Quick, Flora! The doctor!"

But Flora did not move. She was on her knees with her hands on the packets of papers and she stared over her shoulder at her father, so that Daniel Steele cried out: "Do you, Harry, run," but a gurgle from Sir Thomas stayed the boy; he was muttering that name "Harry! Harry! Harry!"

"Go to him," said the tutor, and led the shrinking child up to the fallen man who had suddenly become an object grotesque and horrible, remote from humanity. "Take his hand, Harry," said the tutor. "Look! he wants to speak to you, I think he's trying to say 'good-bye.' You see, he loves you after all! Take it!"

"Oh, must I?" wailed the boy, crouching back against the tutor.

"He's dying," said Mr. Steele, trying to untie the tight knots of the old man's soiled cravat. "It is a stroke. The doctor warned us against a sudden and violent emotion. Raise his head up a little."

The baronet groaned and his eyes turned in his head, his fat, helpless fingers fumbled for his son. The tutor pushed the boy forward and with

a cry Harry Brodie kissed his father's forehead and then sank huddled beside him.

"Lift him up," said Mr. Steele, who had quietly taken command of the situation. "Take the boy away, Mr. Darrell, and do what you can for him. This is an end of Sir Thomas. Get the doctor, Flora, will you now, though it is too late?"

She rose, and without a word or a look at the dying man, left the room.

"Can I do nothing?" asked Mr. Darrell, who had clasped to him the thin, slack form of Harry Brodie.

"No," said Mr. Steele, "nothing. He is dead! I was warned that it might be like this."

The tutor looked at the letters scattered on the floor.

"And those?" he whispered.

"I will take them, I suppose I have the right."

The two men looked at each other over the dead man.

"I can't deny it," said Mr. Darrell hoarsely. He led the boy from the room.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE sunbeams struck with an intermittent brilliance and warmth among the snow-clouds as Henry Darrell left Criffel Hall. The house and the landscape were vague and monstrous about him, no longer definite and solid, but compounded of his fancy and experience during the months that he had spent in these alien surroundings, which yet had housed his heart's desire.

The white and opulent façade of the handsome mansion, the wintry park, the winged steps of the terrace on which he had first seen Harriet, the long avenue up which he had ridden with so much reluctance and embarrassment for the first time not so many weeks ago, all this prospect, dull, static, and darkly coloured, yet seemed to him full of violence.

The material objects about him formed only an ornate unreality, which masked the push and urge, the seething force of all the phantoms that were engendered from his inner conflict.

Within a few hours of Sir Thomas Brodie's death, Flora had ordered the tutor from the house and he had no longer any other authority to whom to appeal. The arrogant woman was indeed the mistress of the establishment, of the fortunes and the person of her brother. No one disputed that she had been left his guardian; everyone in Criffel Hall had instantly become subservient to her. The boy, of course, bewil-

dered, shocked, overwhelmed by his sudden bereavement, could do nothing. Mr. Darrell had not even seen him, he was closed away in his apartment with Mr. Bonthron and a servant.

Harriet was beyond his reach also, it was useless for him to even ask questions about her. Once it was known that Miss Brodie had dismissed him, he was less than nothing in the household. Only an old servant to whom he had been kind, contrived to whisper to him in an odd, unobserved moment in answer to his tentative inquiry that Miss Harriet was very well, only keeping her room with the French lady. Miss Harriet was grieved and startled, of course, but then it must be admitted that Sir Thomas had not been very near to any of his children, and the young lady had her own marriage to think of. . . .

It was also by a servant's hand that Miss Brodie's dismissal, even more abrupt than the first, had come. It was accompanied by a neat package containing a rouleau of guineas—his pay, flung at him, as it were, in the most humiliating fashion.

Henry Darrell had not that manner of pride that would have left the money tossed on the dressing-table where had stood the mirror in the goatskin case or cast down on the bed, which had become to him so pleasant and familiar. He had earned the money, he needed it, he could not afford to retaliate on her petty vindictiveness; so he put the gold gravely away in his baggage; it was all he possessed in the world. He took nothing more with him from Criffel Hall than he had brought in, save only the sword which had been Harry Brodie's gift the first night of his

arrival. This, with its splendid scabbard and dangling gilt tassels, was too splendid for his wearing. He strapped it to his valise, which was behind him on the horse that Miss Brodie had graciously allowed him—so ran the servant's message—to take him as far as the inn in the village across the heath where he might hire his own mount.

As he had passed through the corridors to come down the stairs for the last time—the *last* time, as he had reminded himself—he had seen the servants, lazy and sullen but with an air of artificial industry, putting up the black hangings in mourning for Sir Thomas Brodie; the master of the house would have ostentatious funeral rights, the utmost pomp and magnificence. He would be borne first to the chapel for a splendid service, and then across the bare, frost-bitten path to the mausoleum in the little wood where his three wives already lay lonely.

The knocking and hammering as the black draperies were set in place was in the tutor's ears as he left the mansion. And when he had gone to fetch his horse from the sumptuous stables he had seen the black-tailed steeds, which were reserved for these gloomy occasions, being dressed and groomed.

The tutor rode slowly, his air was almost sedate; his back was straight, his shoulders squared, but his eyes had the dry glitter of one who has passed many sleepless nights. The contour of his face seemed to have sunk so that the bony structure was visible, and his lips, naturally full and curved, were drawn straightly.

"Never again, never again," he was saying to himself. "How can I find you, dear, in the dark?"

He turned a little in the saddle as he passed through the great gates and put his hand behind him on the valise, which held the little travelling mirror in the goatskin case, the mirror in which he had seen the rainbow, the mirror that had held his "veil'd delight." But that, he thought, would now be utterly blank, *must* be blank to him, or be destroyed.

At the inn he did not, as he was no doubt expected to do, merely change horses and continue on his way, but hired a bedroom. He told the host that he would stay the night there and continue on his way in the morning. He had, indeed, to have some leisure in which to collect his thoughts and to make his plans, for he knew not where he was going nor what he intended to do.

The stillness of the long, dun-coloured moorland village where at the end of the one street a grey monolith rose against the sky, was like a spell after the noise and ejaculations, the fury and tumult of the last few hours, the sudden scandal, the flaring up of passions, the swift death. This dull silence fell about him with the swift certainty of the end of life itself.

The place was poor, sordid in its humility. The village was some way from the high-road and travellers were few. Those who came and went from the great house stopped at the town, and Henry Darrell had caught a glance or two of surprise given him by the ostler to whom he had entrusted the horse from Criffel Hall. He knew what the man's stupid wonder meant: what was he doing here, half an hour's ride away from the Hall, why had he left so suddenly immediately after the unexpected death of the baronet, which

had caused a wave of ferment and astonishment over the countryside?

So acute was his nervous tension that he felt as if he were on the verge of some odd disaster. Against the grey winter sky the wide street, a straggle of low stone houses, which seemed to lead from nowhere to nowhere, abruptly wound from the moor and on to the moor again; this scene and the monolith purposelessly erected by forgotten folk to an unknown god, all seemed but a drop-cloth behind some scene of violence and horror in which he should be the chief actor.

Meanwhile nothing was happening about him. It was but a little humble inn where the drovers and shepherds paused to rest and drink their beer and warm themselves by the fire in the big parlour. His room was as commonplace and ordinary as any that had ever housed him—a truckle bed, a sloping floor, a chair, a table, a ewer of water and a folded napkin, and in the corner his valise, the sword in the magnificent sheath fastened under the strap.

It was cold, but he did not notice that, and his chilled flesh helped to increase his sense of panic and terror. He reasoned with himself, coolly, and without success, as the mind will work almost mechanically in moments of intolerable stress.

Walking up and down with his hands clasped behind the skirts of his coat and his chin sunk on his disarranged cravat, his dark hair falling over his dark eyes, Henry Darrell thus argued with himself, trying to subdue his passions by reasoning.

"She is safe and I have left her. Why should I concern myself any more with this obscure tangle?" What would Daniel Steele find in the

letters? He would not read them, no, one could be assured of that. "He prides himself on being what he terms a gentleman. And he has been well bred in conventionality. He will return the letters to her without reading them. And yet—— No, I will not think like that. I will think that he, of course, regarded all as trivial malice, as a senseless flare of vindictiveness on the part of Flora Brodie. He will not credit for a second what she said, nay, he will feign to himself so strongly that he did not hear it and now it will be forgotten in his heart."

But again the tutor's thoughts came to a check with: "And yet? And yet? . . ."

The day darkened down with a threat of a storm and he went to the window and stared up and down the bleak street. The place seemed without inhabitants, yet full of menace, and swiftly all the menace seemed explained, all the portents fulfilled.

A man came riding briskly from the moorlands; Henry Darrell, prying from under the eaves, saw the horseman straighten his hat in a gust of wind, the dull light run in the buckle of his swordbelt, in the metal mount of his saddle and his stirrup. It was Daniel Steele, and he dismounted at the inn.

Henry Darrell waited, he heard his name being called below in the clear, decisive tones of the gentleman, the rough awed utterance of the countryman, then a firm step upon the stairs.

Henry Darrell opened the rickety door and there coming up was Daniel Steele, with his hat under his arm and the strong colour whipped into his face by the cold air and the rising wind. He looked up, saw the tall dark man waiting for him, and exclaimed:

"Ah, I thought you would be here, I thought you would not leave without seeing me. I went up

to the Hall to find you," he added rapidly, "but they told me you had gone. The groom who brought the horse back said you were here."

"You thought that I should wait for you," said Henry Darrell without moving, "believe me, I have not thought of you at all."

Mr. Steele paused on the edge of the stair and looked gravely and intently at the other. Mr. Darrell noted that he wore a mourning scarf tied round the sleeve of his fine blue coat.

"What could you have to say to me?" demanded the tutor.

"Let me come in and I'll tell you; we can't talk on the stairs."

"We could for all I have to say, Mr. Steele." But Henry Darrell stood aside and allowed the other man to pass into the mean chamber, which he did not feel in any sense to be his, the most alien as well as the most forlorn of this wretched inn.

"Did you come here to question me?" he asked, and he edged towards the baggage into the back of which was strapped Harry Brodie's sword.

"No, I did not. I came to tell you what I thought you ought to know." Mr. Steele spoke modestly and in a kindly fashion, but his looks were stern and troubled, with an expression unfamiliar to his ruddy face. "Death alters everything, does it not?" he added, "even the death of one who will not be, perhaps, greatly missed nor much mourned."

He waited, as if he expected some encouragement, some sympathy, but the tutor stood silent, withdrawn into himself. Mr. Steele continued with a slight forcing of his resolution.

"Harriet Brodie and I are to be married almost immediately—next week—without any festival, of

course. I thought she would be safer," he added, with the air of a man who gives an explanation to one who has the right to demand it, "happier with me."

"Yes," said Henry Darrell, "yes."

"I thought you would like to know it."

"I am glad for Miss Harriet Brodie's sake," replied the tutor in a voice that came with difficulty. "It is very civil of you, sir, to have come yourself to give me this message."

"None other could have given it," replied Mr. Steele simply. "I wanted to tell you, too, about her desk and the contents. She has them again."

"She has them! And where are they now?"

"Destroyed," said Mr. Steele. "I gave them to her last evening when she was by the fire."

"You were allowed to see her," said the tutor, putting his hand to his mouth, "and to speak to her?"

"Yes, I had the right. I gave her the little desk and the packets of letters I had picked up. I don't know what they were—a child's scribblings, I suppose—but I said, 'If your sister torments you by snatching these, why not destroy them and have done with it?' and so she did, Mr. Darrell. She took them up while I stood there and burnt them all."

The tutor gave a great sigh of relief, yet an intense rage shook him; the letters were gone, they had been burnt, and at another man's dictation. They had been his, written to him, and he had never read them. Mr. Steele hurried on with a lack of assurance and a certain trembling in his voice.

"Need you go away, sir? Harry will miss you very much. Harry is the master now, you know."

"Never mind that—I can't stay."

"If you mean," suggested Mr. Steele, "Miss Flora, she is going away—abroad, I think she said."

"I can't stay," repeated the tutor. He sat down on the low chair with the broken back by his baggage, and drew the sword out from under the strap. "Harry gave me this the first night I came to Criffel Hall, but I've never liked to wear it, it is too fine for my place, a gaudy piece. Forgive me if I sit, I feel a giddiness, a cloudiness, sir, in the sight."

He looked down at his dusty coat and his soiled boots, and asked suddenly and fearfully:

"You heard what Miss Flora Brodie said about her sister and myself?"

"No," said Mr. Steele strongly, "no!"

"Don't lie! You heard, and you remember. She said Harriet used to come to my room. Supposing it were true——?"

"I'm to be married to her next week," said Mr. Steele clearly. "I wish good will to everyone—I should like to do you some service. No doubt you are not now, sir, in a mood to consider that offer. Stay here a while and think of it. I am very much at your disposition."

Henry Darrell rose with the sword in his hand.

"A man who has nothing cannot afford to be generous." He took the hilt in his right hand.

"It would please me to draw this now and put you out of the way. You've never harmed me and I like you, no doubt you are my superior in everything."

He drew the sword, and though there was so little light in the room, the steel flashed.

"You cannot deny a man his spiritual fulfil-

ment," muttered the tutor, "but if you drive one too far, take everything from him and force him when his back's to the wall . . ." He said, as if to himself, "Why don't I rush on him with this, put him out of the way?"

Mr. Steele made no attempt to draw his own weapon and the other man seemed exasperated at his tranquillity.

"Why don't you take care?" he asked. "Don't you see that I'm mad, that I've endured it long enough? Why did you come?"

"To tell you she was safe," said Mr. Steele. "And now—good-bye."

He turned his back on the man with the drawn sword and left the room slowly. The tutor went to the head of the stairs and watched him descend, then he slowly returned the sword to the red scabbard, went back into the dreary, bleak, half-furnished room, sat down on the broken chair by the shabby valise, and put his face in his hands, resting his elbows on his knees. And he felt the tears, hot, difficult and bitter, moistening his palms.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE tutor stayed, obscure and unnoticed, in the sullen village, while Sir Thomas Brodie, in the midst of a gathering of the gentlefolk of the countryside, was borne to the brick mausoleum in the stripped woods.

He heard talk of the bustle and the show and the ostentatious display of costly mourning and the manufactured wreaths, through the medium of the half-awed, half-spiteful gossip of the villagers that did not touch even the fringe of the luxurious funeral feast. All the news of Criffel Hall came to him with the remoteness as if it were echoes of some world that he had long ceased to inhabit.

Only one visitor disturbed his solitude and this was most unexpected. A lawyer's clerk called upon him to inform him as he had not been present at the reading of Sir Thomas Brodie's will, that the baronet had left a small annuity in a codicil, which also expressed a gentlemanly appreciation of the tutor's care of Master Harry Brodie and his sister. A capital securely invested in Consols for the benefit of Mr. Henry Darrell would bring him in one hundred and fifty pounds a year for the rest of his natural life. Utter want and the misery of complete dependence need thus no longer be feared by the tutor.

This vast benefit had been conferred, ironically enough, by a man whom he had not liked, scarcely known, and not even served with much diligence.

He received the news of his good fortune with indifference. He had no address to give the lawyer's clerk; he was not, he said, in want of ready money. Upstairs in the valise close to the mirror in the goatskin case, lay untouched the *rouleau* of guineas sent him by Flora's angry, contemptuous hands. He heard, without emotion, that she had left Criffel Hall and the country. Two days after her father was buried she had departed with a train of servants in a great mourning coach with her arms in a diamond on the panel, and Madame Duchéne in attention. A distant relation remained in Criffel Hall in charge of Harriet Brodie, who, within twenty-four hours, would be under the protection of her husband.

All this Henry Darrell heard from the dull, stupid, half-incoherent gossip of the landlord and the rustics who came and went in the inn. And he heard without expression of emotion or even of interest. He moved, he ate, he slept like an automaton, his aspect was at once dull and wild, and every morning he said: "Get me a horse, to-day. I'll ride to York," and every afternoon: "No. I'll stay another night."

The day that she was to be married, he rose very early. His spirit had taken complete possession of his body; there were no more doubts or hesitations, nor lethargies, nor reluctances. He unbuckled his valise, drew out the mirror in the goatskin case, uncovered it, and set it on the rickety table where stood the ewer over which was folded the coarse napkin.

The room was cold and in the phantasmal light of the dawn, which gave every object a bluish hue and a blurred shadow, Henry Darrell sank on his knees before the mirror, the mirror in which he

had seen the rainbow, and his lips, dry and stiff, formed only one word: "Come!"

So intense was his fixity of gaze on the smoky square of glass which reflected nothing but the uncertain mingling of light and shade in the chamber, that everything material seemed to dissolve about him and he floated in space—the mirror was a star hung before his eyes—and still in a hoarse, nervous voice he repeated, "Come!"

Then, as he was conscious of a continued silence about him, and as he could see nothing in the mirror but a dazzle of light, he began to murmur like an incantation: "Do you not know me, must we waste any more time? I've been wrong to delay so long. The world comes between one, one is so dull and sluggardly, one allows it, dear. Oh, darling, darling, why don't you come? If you knew the loneliness—but you do know, because you are lonely too, come, come, even if it is only for a little while, even if it means we are both annihilated. Why did I struggle against it so long? Why were your eyes veiled so that you did not know me?"

His face sank on his clasped hands which gripped the edge of the table on which stood the mirror. He felt his own lips murmuring against his flesh, and then presently were silent. Exerting all the force of his soul and spirit to command her, to draw her, time had ceased to be for him, he knew not how the minutes fled. Nor did he know if he had swooned or slept or if his soul had left his body in a trance, but when he opened his eyes he lay dazzled, for the room was full of the light of the bleak day.

He looked into the mirror, feeling suddenly at ease. And there was her face, distinct behind his

own, only faintly blurred by the ripple of the uneven surface of the glass. He rose, and turned.

She was standing behind him in a long coat that was wet and soiled round the hem with dead leaves and mud and winter slush. Her hair was unconfined, her head unshielded, a radiance of delight shone in her eyes, her cheeks, and on the dewy lustre of her rounded lips.

"Harry, why didn't you let me come before?"

He took her hands, they were cold and damp from rain or dew. He saw that there was an undulating light half over her figure; she seemed at once to waver and to shine. They sat down side by side on the truckle bed with the coarse white coverlet; he was utterly exhausted, and leaning on her shoulder, wept.

"I can't think," said the girl, "where you've been all this while. Didn't we make an appointment long ago?"

"I've kept it at last, dear."

"Yes. Everything's been rather indistinct. You wouldn't let me come before, you kept pushing me away."

"Never mind, dear; never mind, Harriet, don't think of that now. Oh, what ease and peace! Isn't ease and peace, dear, release and contentment?"

She nodded, as if not fully understanding what he said. He looked at her with an intense expectancy, slipped from the bed to his knees, and buried his face in her lap.

"Oh, Harriet!"

She put her little hand on his hair, her unsullied eyes were full of joy.

"Can't we go away from this place, it is so dull here?"

"Where you will, as you will." He thought with contentment of his little hoard of money—enough to get them away, enough for their marriage. He thought of the modest pension that her father had left—enough for them to live on, surely.

He rose again and sat on the bed and clasped her, not daring yet to do more than lightly kiss her wind-blown hair. He felt her stiffen in his embrace.

"There's someone outside, they have come after me. Don't let them take me back."

"No, no," he said, quite sure that he would not lose her now. Of course they would discover her, they would try to prevent this happiness, of course, and of course their happiness would be prevented. But she should not be taken away from him. He rose to face the intruder. As the rap came on the door he said, "Come in! Oh, come in."

It was Daniel Steele who entered, his face so changed from his ordinary appearance that a familiar of his would scarcely have known him.

"You've tracked her! You've followed her," said Henry Darrell.

The young man replied, very low:

"I was up early this morning, at dawn, I suppose. I went to the Hall and kept watch on the terrace, I don't know why I played the sentinel. I saw her come out, wrapped in her coat, by the little side door. One of the gardeners who was going to his work spoke to her but she didn't hear him. I followed her—I and the boy, he's been watching her too, he's so anxious. There were others noticed it, but we turned them back and came alone."

"Daniel," said the girl, "I've got to go away

with him, do you understand? I didn't know him before, but it's clear now."

"I tried not to," said the tutor, "but I couldn't help it."

"Do you think I'll interfere?" demanded Mr. Steele hoarsely. "I ought to have given way before, but I wasn't quite sure. To-day, of course—you called her, I suppose. Well, she's yours, and her brother's below. Won't you come down and speak to him?"

"You understand then?" said the tutor.

"I shan't interfere," replied the young squire. "I'll give you everything. But she'd better go home now, this isn't something you want talked about."

"I ought to say I'll go away, I ought to leave her to you, at once," said Mr. Darrell, "but somehow I can't, I have gone too far."

"I don't ask you," said Mr. Steele quietly. "Harriet, your brother's downstairs, he'll be glad to see you. He loves you too, Harriet."

But the girl did not move; she lay on the bosom of her lover as one who, after a weary wait of years, has seen and found repose at last.

"Can this ever be adjusted," said the tutor, "I mean the worldly upset?—all that I cannot do, all that I should have done, all that I ought to do?"

"Do not concern yourself overmuch—her father left her honourably dowered. He left me, too, her guardian, so you'll have no consent to ask save that which is already given."

His surroundings shifted and cleared round Henry Darrell; he saw everything distinctly and with an overpowering sense of revelation—the weary, defeated face of the other man who smiled

at him, the childish outline of the girl who leant on his own bosom.

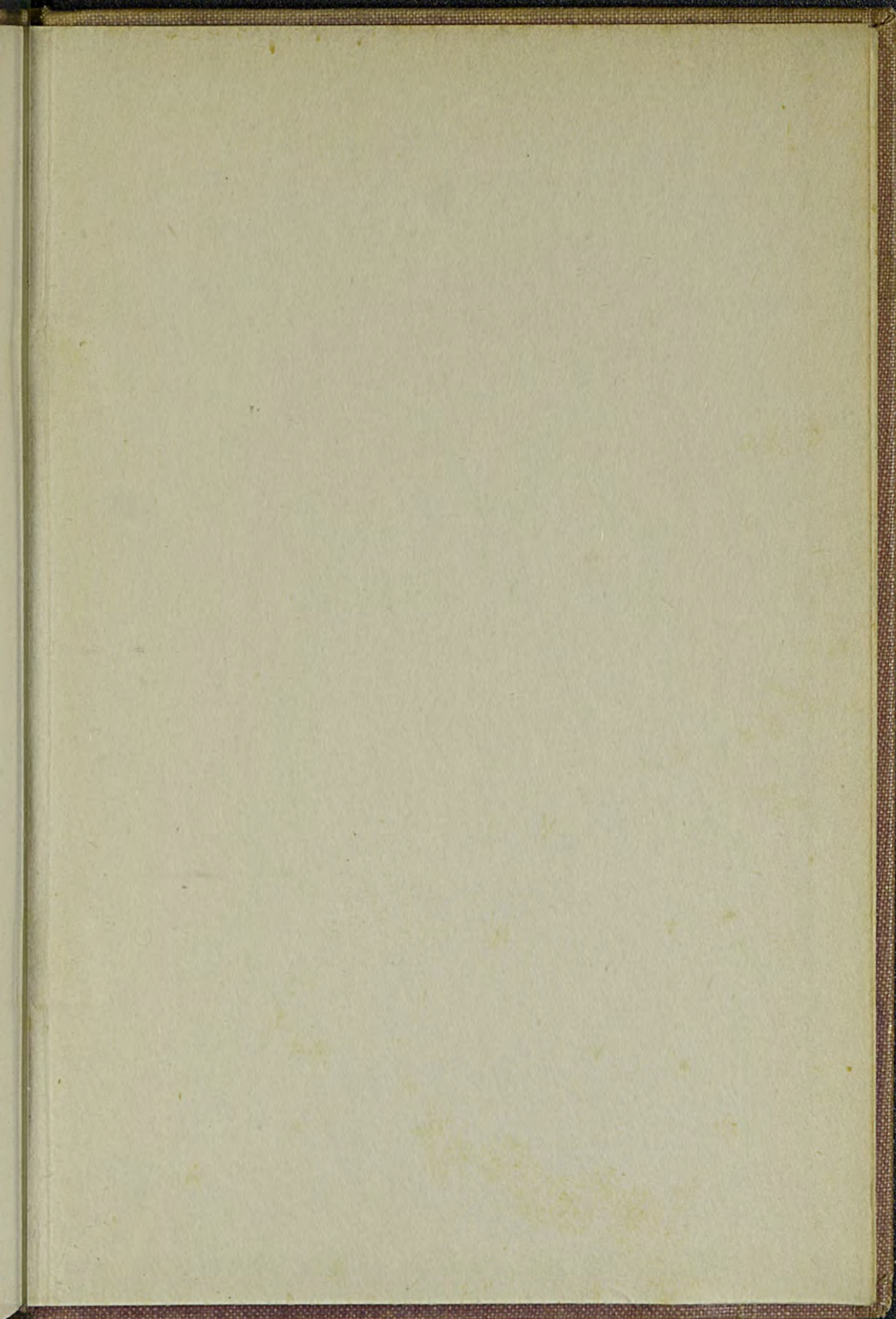
"Let us go away," he said repeatedly. "I think that would be best, would it not?" Then, looking at the fragile face on his shoulder: "She's asleep. It's no deeper than sleep, is it?"

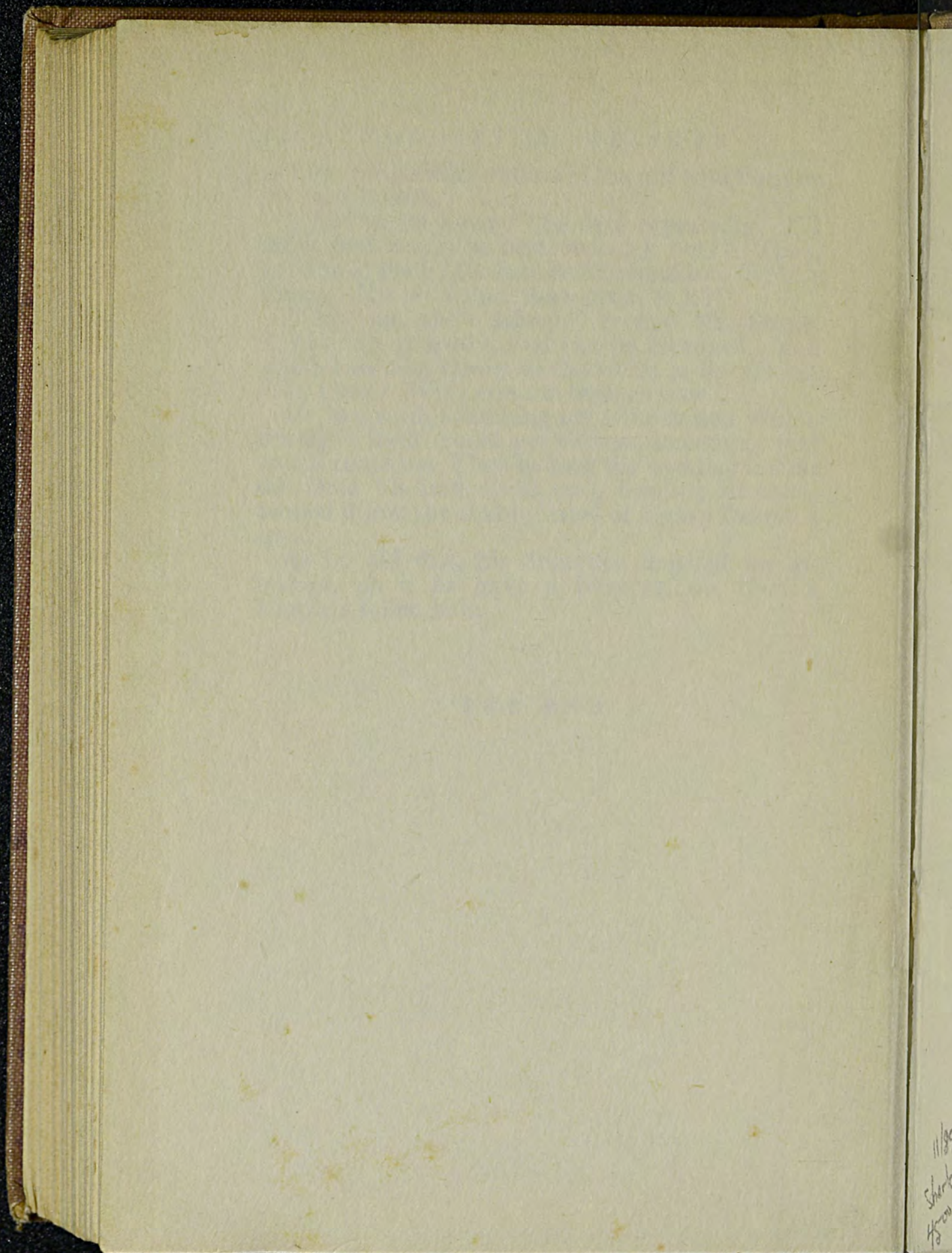
"No, no, she's asleep," replied Mr. Steele. "You can go away, that can be arranged. You wanted to take Harry to the south in the spring, didn't you? Well, you can both go now."

He hesitated, searching for some action which, trivial in itself, could yet express something that words could not. Then he took the wedding favour out from his buttonhole and, bending forward, pinned it into the shabby lapel of Henry Darrell's coat.

As he did this, his fingertips lingered for an instant, as if he gave a blessing, on Harriet Brodie's fallen hair.

THE END





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