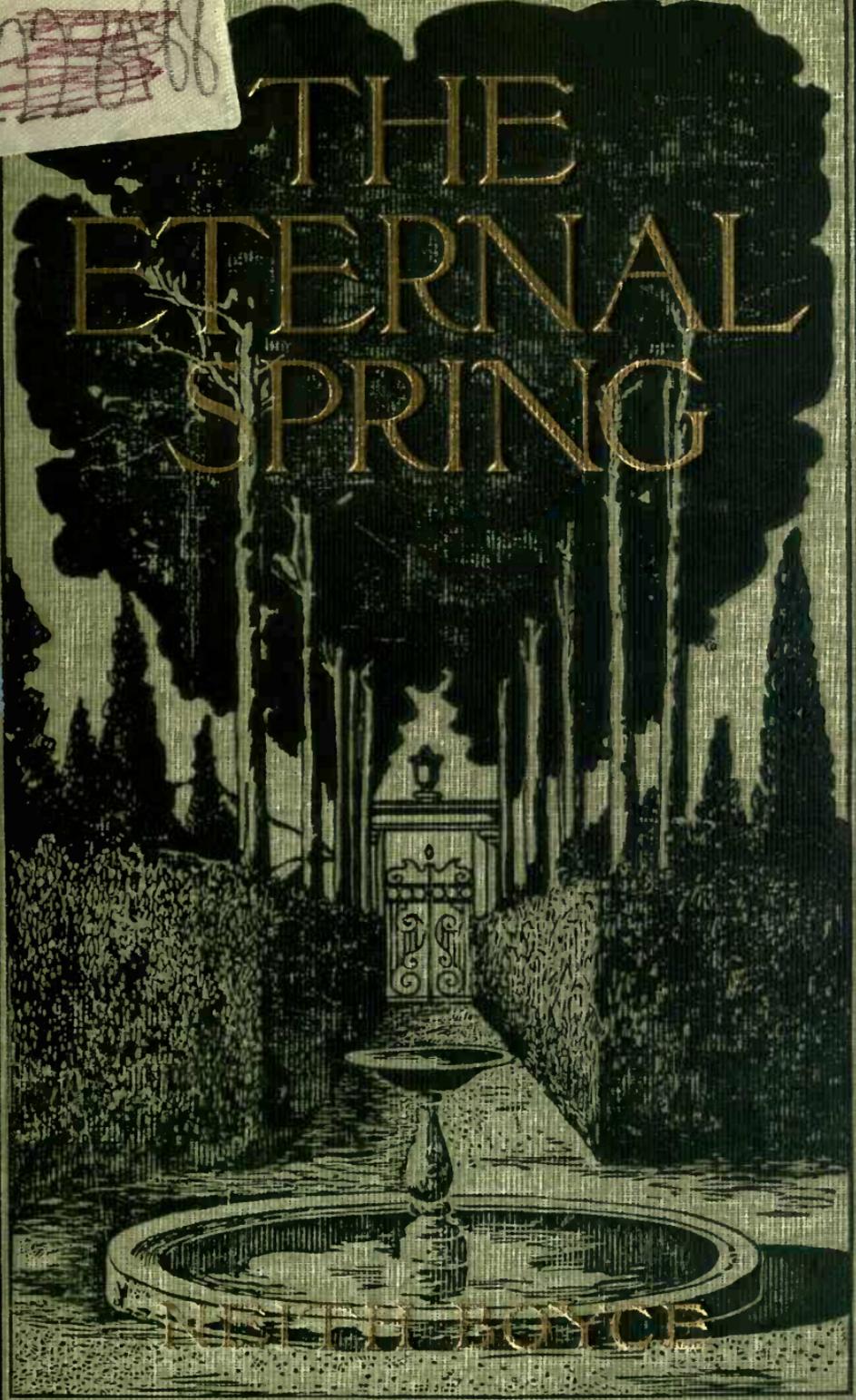


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# THE ETERNAL SPRING

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THE ETERNAL SPRING







“ ‘ You are exactly like a Lippo Lippi Madonna—how wonderful ! ’ ”

THE  
ETERNAL  
SPRING

*A Novel*

By NEITH BOYCE

Author of

“The Forerunner,” “The Folly of Others,” Etc.

*Illustrations by Blendon Campbell*



NEW YORK  
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1906

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# THE ETERNAL SPRING

## CHAPTER I

CARLETON found her, as he had expected, at the *Stazione Centrale*, standing on the platform, a little out of the crowd, waiting for him to come to her. He saw her first; saw her bright, veiled, eager look as she glanced over the incoming passengers, saw her start toward him and smile.

“It’s really you?” she said in a breathlessly quiet tone, and the smile flickered on her mouth, which was never two moments the same.

As the best answer, Carleton held her hand and looked at her. His deep-set blue eyes glowed with pleasure. Apparently he was willing to stand just there, holding her hand and looking at her, indefinitely. Mrs. Craven made the move; and, the matter of baggage having been disposed of, took him out to her carriage. Damiano, the old coach-

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man with the humorous Irish face, had a smiling salute of recognition for him. And as the victoria rolled on into the mesh of narrow stone lanes which are Florentine streets, it carried Carleton into a labyrinth of pleasant memories—a flash here, an enchanting glimpse there; the city herself seemed to salute him with smiling remembrance.

His Florentine past, in which Elizabeth Craven was so much concerned, revived in silence rather than in speech. After the first few words there was a pause. Mrs. Craven, leaning a little away from him in her corner of the seat, watched him in the silence that implied that past. She was giving him time for his impression. She waited for him to speak. And this struck Carleton at once as an unexpected change that the five years had made in her. But she, too, was noting changes. Each of them, after the first welcome to the known, was taking account of the unknown.

“At last!” Carleton said with a quick sigh.

He was looking at her as he spoke; but beyond her he saw also the Duomo and the Tower, set flat there on the city pavement, in that casual, uncon-

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cerned way that had always been half their beauty to him—and his words were partly for them and all they represented.

“Yes, it was time,” she said, smiling tremulously. “How old we have grown!”

“‘We?’ No, not you. How could you grow old? But I have been through the mill. I have been ground to powder. Don’t you keep Medea’s caldron somewhere in your hills? Can’t I be put in overnight and boiled young again?”

“We’ll see what we can do for you,” murmured Mrs. Craven, studying him. “Yes, you’ve been through the mill. That horrible America! To devour you whole in five years!”

Carleton took off his hat, to reveal the extent of the devastation.

“Yes, actually you are, a little!” she sighed. “And see my grey hairs.”

Carleton shook his head. There were a few in her red-brown tresses—her main beauty—but, as she knew well enough, they were invisible from his distance. She mentioned them, as she had disdained the illusion of a veil; the print of time was certain to be discovered, and she meant to start

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fair, with nothing to be scored up later. She wore, however, a drooping lace hat, and the time was after seven in the evening. In the old, crowded streets, through which Damiano drove rapidly, with a superb disregard of scurrying foot-passengers, it was already twilight; when they came out into the newer quarter, and then beyond the walls into the country, the air was warm, and golden, and kind.

Carleton looked about him with delight.

“It is just the same,” he said. “At least, if there are changes I don’t see them, don’t wish to see them. Essentially there can’t be any change. That’s what I’ve counted on in coming back—something complete, finished, perfect—rest for one’s soul, and ‘quiet breathing.’ It’s ‘the Last Refuge,’ ” he quoted, laughing.

“Ah, how you have grown old! You were not looking for a last refuge when you were here before!”

“I meant to come back here. It’s true I meant to come sooner than I have done—and not quite such a wreck. But once caught in the machinery over there——”

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“ Oh, I know. But who would have thought you ambitious—capable of being caught! ”

“ Ambitious I never was. Being caught is—a matter of surplus energy and the opinion of the community. You’re too little of an American now to understand. And I want to forget that I ever understood it. I’ve lost not only my surplus energy, but all except barely enough to keep me together. I’m an empty shell that the sea has cast at your feet! ”

“ Then I’ll keep you for the sake of the interesting creature that once abode in you—and for old times’ sake,” said Mrs. Craven.

Her eyes—gold-brown, wide-spaced, and water-clear—seemed still not to have finished their survey. They were expressive eyes, and they showed concern that was almost alarm, as in the brighter light she saw the faded pallor of Carleton’s brown face, and his lankness. His clothes hung on his big frame with a suggestion of nothing much but bones under them. And the sub-structure of his face, always very evident, was now painfully so, in cheek-bones and jaw, and about his eyes. He seemed to have got down to the absolute essentials

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of physical being. But these essentials had a good deal of body, and looked durable. He looked like an over-trained athlete—powerful and useless. All his remaining vitality seemed concentrated in his eyes, of a peculiarly vivid colour and intensity.

“ You didn’t tell me you were ill ! ”

“ I’m not—but only promised to be, if I kept on in harness. They promised me nervous prostration. I pretended to think I had it, anyway, and pulled out. I really am rather useless. It isn’t treating you very well, I know. Perhaps I ought to have warned you——”

“ Oh,” she murmured, her eyes and hands busy with a small parasol, which she half-raised and then put down again.

Carleton understood her. The nervous gesture, the sudden plaintive compression of her lips, were like her old self. They meant that the sensitive and self-distrustful creature had been hurt, and he knew how. But he looked at her quietly. There would be time enough to explain himself.

“ There’s one thing that might have been different,” she said with a little effort. “ There are some people at the house.”

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“ Oh, of course—there always would be! ”  
Carleton smiled.

“ But they are here for a long visit—as long as I stay—till it gets hot. They are relatives of Mr. Craven.”

“ Oh, relatives——”

“ It isn't as bad as it sounds, though. They are very, very distant cousins—I suppose you'd hardly count the relationship at all; but, you see, they are Southerners—that is, the family. However, they needn't bother you in the least. They're quite civilised—oh, you'll see! ” She broke off and laughed.

“ Whether I shall bother them is the question. I'm afraid I can't pretend to any ' life-enhancing ' qualities at present—if I ever had them.”

They smiled at the old, familiar phrase.

“ Ah, we shall get on,” said Mrs. Craven. “ If you don't like one another, the place is big enough. Only if I'd known earlier that you were coming I wouldn't have asked them.”

“ You haven't said who or what ' they ' are.”

“ ‘ They ' are Mrs. Langham and her daughter. I am very fond of the girl. They've lived about over here for many years—in fact, since Clara was

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a baby. But I never saw them till lately, for there was a—family quarrel between Mrs. Langham and Mr. Craven.”

It was the second time Elizabeth had spoken her husband's name; but Carleton found it as difficult to speak of him or of her widowhood as it had been to write to her, two years ago, the letter that could not be exactly condolence. He had written the letter, but with the same feeling of awkwardness that now hindered his speech.

“You have had much to go through—in these last years,” he said, after a pause. “Mr. Craven's illness——”

“Yes,” said Elizabeth briefly. “And I've been lonely. . . . But we won't talk of that now.”

Elizabeth was sincere, and conventional. She wouldn't say that she regretted the death of her husband—nor that she did not regret it.

It struck Carleton suddenly that she was dressed in what he had heard ladies call half-mourning—a long, pale-grey coat and dress, with black for the only relief. She had been fond of colours, rather gay and coquettish in attire. The coquetry, in

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fact, remained. He had noticed her high-heeled, small grey shoes; the long, soft gloves, wrinkling up into the loose sleeves of her wrap; a faint foreign breath of violets. She was picturesque, as she had always been, and she had, somehow, more style, of her very feminine sort. He wondered, though, if she could be still wearing mourning for James Craven. Or was it, perhaps, that she began to feel the shadow of years? Decidedly she was older—she was within sight of the fatal fortieth.

Their drive was nearly at an end. The horses were taking the long hill slowly. The stony road wound between high grey walls, within which, as Carleton could see, looking down on the lower slopes, blue-green wheat stood in long billows, spotted with scarlet poppies. Their sky-line above was now a ridge of nodding grass and flowers, now a wall running over with flowering vines, now a row of grey-green olives. They had left the noisy tram behind, and all other evidences of the modern order. The villa-gates that they passed were old; the walls were immemorially old. The olive trees had a look of the wisdom of ages. Even the wav-

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ing wheat and the flowers, with all their freshness of spring, suggested all the other springs that had flowered there, within these same stone boundaries, out of the historic soil. Halfway up the hill they came to the gateway of La Fontanella. At one side of the open gate stood a splendid peasant-boy, new to Carleton, but smiling a welcome.

“The gardener,” said Mrs. Craven. “And you remember Roberto? There he is. He and this one,” pointing to the coachman, “are the only old ones left.”

The carriage rolled in and stopped before the open hall-doors. Carleton had an effusive greeting from Roberto, the moustachioed butler. And he lingered a moment in the doorway, casting a look of recognition round the little domain of La Fontanella—the wall of the garden, the tiny chapel, the terrace with its boundary line of great cypresses from which one looked down on Florence in its valley. The buff stucco front of the house made the fourth side of the enclosure. Nothing had been changed, outside or in, so far as Carleton could see. The broad, long hall, inviting as of old, still boasted the primitive pictures, part of Cra-

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ven's collection of twenty years. Its narrow benches with embroidered cushions, its bowls of flowers, even, stood in the same places. Carleton glanced down on the table in the niche by the stairs, half expecting to see Craven's gloves and hat—the broad-leafed hat which had set off the old man's tossed silver hair, and with the Roman cloak wrapping his wiry frame, had made him so picturesque a figure, pacing the antique garden or the terrace. For the moment that figure was very present to Carleton—the keen old face, the piercing eyes and close-pressed mouth—the chill of age, wise without geniality. . . .

“Dinner is at eight,” said Elizabeth. “We shall be rather late, so come down just as you are, will you?”

She took him to the door of his old rooms, and laid her hand on his arm in friendly fashion. “It's so awfully jolly to see you again!” was her parting word.

Jolly? Well, perhaps, in the sense of her English slang. In that sense the house itself was jolly—the view, Carleton's bedroom, with its grey plaster walls and immense pieces of furniture of black

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Italian walnut. But jollity, in its strict meaning, was hardly to him the note of this meeting.

It was still light enough to dispense with lamp and candles as he made his abbreviated toilet. From the dressing-room he went into the sitting-room, where he had once spent a good many hours trying to write a Borrowesque novel. Here there were a few alterations. The hangings were a different colour—a dull crimson brocade, some new treasure. There was a desk of French marquetry which had formerly been in Elizabeth's own room. There were some shelves of books. Probably, he thought, she had been using these rooms herself. On the table there was a great bowl of the jasmine he liked, and a few pale roses. And on the wall near the door a gleam of gold caught his eye. It was a tiny picture, on the background of which only a few lines of colour remained—the brow, cheek, and lips of a Madonna. Carleton remembered that picture—it had hung in Craven's bedroom. And he remembered clearly the buying of the picture. It had been brought to the door under the arm of one of the many Italians who knew Craven as a collector. On the terrace out there it

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had been studied and discussed. And Craven had bought it, under Elizabeth's protest at the price, Carleton sitting by, an amused listener. Why had Elizabeth hung the picture here? Had she come to care for it, or was it for him?

A velvety footstep and discreet knock interrupted his musings.

"*Avanti,*" he called.

Roberto's high-pitched voice responded in the old-fashioned Italian phrase which intimated that if by chance the Signor were pleased to permit, dinner might be considered ready in the *salotto*.

## CHAPTER II

CARLETON was a little dazzled by the company in which he found himself. It consisted simply of the two house-guests, Elizabeth's relatives, and a young Italian, Dr. Morelli; but the feminine part of it reminded the newcomer of a favourite fresco, Orcagna's "Paradiso." They were three as charming women, he thought, as it had ever been his fortune to see. And yet charming was not exactly the word—certainly not the word for Mrs. Langham. Carleton felt that Elizabeth might have prepared him a little—unless, indeed, she for some reason wanted him to be dazed.

This carelessly-mentioned cousin was unmistakably a very great beauty—a beauty on really an heroic scale. She must be famous; it argued nothing that *he* had never heard of her. She had the air of a famous person; she was as calmly self-conscious as a festal illumination. She was very wonderfully dressed—too much so for the occa-

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sion, except that probably she was never seen otherwise. She would always think of herself rather than of the occasion, and, like a royal person, could not properly appear without a certain amount of state; thus Carleton summed up his first impression.

It was a gorgeous type—broad in line, and full of dark colour. Carleton had seen its like among pure-blooded Tuscans. She had masses of black hair, artificially rippled, black eyes under splendidly arched brows, a sensuous red mouth, a throat like a column. She was either very slightly or very cleverly made up, and her hands and wrists were heavily jewelled.

She was absorbed in a rapid conversation in French with Morelli, which continued for some time after they sat down at table. Miss Langham sat between her mother and Carleton, and seemed very willing to listen on either side. Elizabeth was asking questions about America, some people whom Carleton had lately seen, and other things in which, he felt, the girl on his right could not be interested. But she was listening, nevertheless, and presently Elizabeth said:

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“Get Mr. Carleton to tell you about Chicago, Clara. Chicago is in the middle of America. America means to Clara,” she explained, “just a great flat stretch of country from which come dollars and tourists. I shall take her over when I go.”

Clara smiled.

“Oh, I am going! Just to make sure that I am as well off as possible here. Sometimes when my landlord is unpleasant, or the servants rob me too much, or people get too dull, I’ve almost got down to take my passage. But somehow——”

“Oh, somehow!” said Miss Langham.

“Take me as a fair sample of America,” suggested Carleton. “I assure you that I bring the real breath of the prairies—I am absolutely typical. Let me save you the journey. And take my word for it, you are well off here. I’ve been thinking of my favourite picture of ‘Paradise,’ down in Florence.”

“Not Fra Angelico? No, no; ours isn’t that sort of a Paradise! But such as it is, you have the freedom of the place. I’ll be Saint Peter and hand over the key to you. Perhaps we might make you

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keeper of the gate—if you'll promise to keep out all bores."

"Don't give me anything to do just yet," begged Carleton. "Much less anything so difficult. Remember, I had a strenuous life of it on earth. Let me have a flowery bed of ease—I've earned it. They've put on my tombstone, 'He lived in Chicago.'"

"You can't very well go back, then."

"I haven't the remotest intention of going back. Why should I go back? I am going to look at fifteenth-century pictures for the rest of my life."

"And what becomes, then, of your newspaper, of your Municipal League, and the rest of it——"

Carleton implied utter rejection.

"Don't ask a freed spirit what becomes of his earthly trammels. I had already forgotten them."

"But, good heavens! what shall we do with you? It's very well to talk; but, after all, you'll have to have some occupation. Everybody has, you know, even here. I'm a housewife, Clara has her music, Dr. Morelli is the busiest man in Florence, and Mrs. Langham—well, she is bored because there isn't enough to do."

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“ Let me find occupation for myself, then, if I must. And for choice, let me look on—at the rest of you. I shan’t want any other distraction at present.”

This speech was sincere and literal. Carleton’s eye was so abundantly interested and satisfied in the immediate spectacle that he cared for nothing else, not even to talk; all the more as he was extremely tired. Weariness, mental and physical, had been his main sensation for many months. The long sea-voyage, the plunge into this sweet, relaxing air, had served so far only to make him conscious that he was tired to death. But there was still life enough in him to respond to the beauty about him, as the warmth of his eyes showed.

The room itself was beautiful in the soft light of candles and Venetian lamps; its ground-colour of greenish-grey, its old furniture a ruddy brown, covered with leather, embossed with great gilt nail-heads. On one buffet, deep-blue dishes stood against the green wall. The mounting steps of another held Venice glass in bubble-like shapes. There were pictures—one opposite Carleton a

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Madonna in dark-blue robe, in a gold heaven. Behind him the windows were open on a balcony which overlooked the dark garden. The fall of the little fountain that gave its name to the villa, the interrupted song of a nightingale in the cypresses, were the only sounds without; within, voices were subdued. Roberto, in white gloves, with moustachios curling into his eyes, circled the table noiselessly; his falsetto whisper offered Carleton white wine or red.

Carleton's eyes came back gratefully to Elizabeth. All this quiet sweetness was hers, and through her, for the time being, his. The duration of his possession depended, he knew, on himself alone. He owed much to her affection in the past; he might, if he would, contract the great debt of all.

She was looking very pretty, her fair colouring lit up by a festal glow of pleasure. She wore a pale-grey dress, and a necklace of old Italian silver and small emeralds. Her face showed quick-flashing spirit, and, above all, eagerness. She had always been eager, often *aigre*, in the intensity of her unsatisfaction, of her craving for something

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that she had not. Now, it seemed to him, she was softened, more subdued in speech and manner, more graceful.

If he studied her, the other three people at the table did so, too; Mrs. Langham with an occasional frank stare across the flower-bowls, Morelli with swift glances, Clara more unobtrusively still. They saw some change in her, or perhaps they were curious to find some.

Mrs. Langham, at Elizabeth's mention of her, looked enquiringly at Carleton and broke in on Morelli's fluent undertone.

"What are you saying about me?" she asked languidly.

"Only that you are bored and that there is nothing to do here," said Elizabeth. "It's true, isn't it?"

"Oh—no. There is plenty to do, only I am such a stupid person, I have no abilities. All you others find enough to do. But I'm not bored—no. Interesting people are always happening along." This in an indolent voice, with a speculative glance at Carleton.

"We have a colony out here, but Mrs. Lang-

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ham doesn't like little neighbourhood dinners, and tea, and scandal. And we have some celebrities, too, but she doesn't like them. There our resources end—except that occasionally we can gather in some stranger like yourself.”

“Unlike myself, I hope, if it's a question of interest,” murmured Carleton. “I'm quite aware that my strangeness is my only claim.”

“Oh, well, *that* won't last long,” said Mrs. Langham. “They will know all about you in a week. That's why I don't like neighbourhoods.”

She did not belong in one, assuredly; in any provincial or parochial nook. So thought Carleton, and instantly questioned his impression. Where did she belong? On a stage of some sort, evidently. She had an air of the world, yet not of any definite “great world.” She might be in a way a hanger-on; or she might be a mere stray on the surface, acquainted with many strange coasts and currents, but not related to any. In Elizabeth's phrase, she had been “living about over here.” In that case, she had hardly made the most of herself, if what she wanted was a stage. Her beauty, he judged, was not matched by intelligence.

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She looked hard, too. But what a splendid figure to make the centre of a room!

The dinner was nearly over, when Carleton became aware that as yet Miss Langham had addressed no remark directly to him, nor had he spoken to her. It was not that she seemed out of it; or if she were, it was by her own will. She seemed to find sufficient interest in listening and observing; she was by far the most impersonal person of the five. As she sat beside Carleton, and much of the time her head was turned away from him, her looks were vaguer to him than the others. But he perceived a profile—dark hair, like the mother's, but unrippled, a slender figure dressed in white, beautiful hands, long and delicate, yet strong. Her voice was soft and rather hesitating, with a veiled quality—it was like the English voice as he had known it in some sensitive and ultra-nervous people.

Next he noticed the line of her head, from the brow to the coil at the nape of her neck; the poise of the head, the delicate outline of her shoulders, the long line from the chin to the base of the throat. Her profile was that of a Lippo Lippi

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“Madonna”; and when she again turned toward him he saw that she really carried out in a marvelous degree that same type—the rounded forehead, the thin, arched eyebrows, the eyes half-covered by drooping lids, the full and pensive mouth.

He looked from her to her mother, and wondered. The girl, he thought, was about twenty—perhaps two or three years older. Mrs. Langham seemed not older than thirty-five or six. Their absolute unlikeness was as much of a puzzle. In combination they were bewildering—and then there was Elizabeth for another distraction. Carleton felt moved to echo the youthful shout in *Figaro*: “*O les femmes et les filles! les filles et les femmes!*”

Morelli, he found, when Elizabeth finally by a question shifted the talk round, spoke excellent English, and seemed to have a keen curiosity about things American. Carleton at first thought him merely polite and fluent; but as they followed the ladies upstairs into the library he asked a rapid series of questions which indicated a personal interest in American ways of living. Particularly he

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wanted to know about Chicago, never, he said, having met any person from there before.

“Have you been in London?” enquired Carleton.

“Oh, yes.”

“Well, perhaps that won’t help you much. Anyhow, imagine a lot of enormous, ugly buildings dumped down on a prairie, with mud underfoot, smoke overhead, and everything between filled with soot—that’s Chicago, outside. Inside, it’s an aggregation of about two million more or less interesting and lawless citizens. Does it sound attractive?”

“I should like to see it,” said Morelli. “I should like to see all America—to see ‘how you do it,’ as you say. Truly, I should like to go and do likewise.”

“In what way?”

“Oh, in my own way, too, doubtless. What I admire is the big things you do. If I could be two people, I should be first what I am, and next an American millionaire, ‘self-made,’ as you say.”

“Even if, to ‘make’ yourself, you had to slave

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fourteen hours a day for years, in a noisy, dirty hole of a city?"

"Oh, work is nothing," remarked Morelli. "I work fourteen hours a day as it is."

Mrs. Langham had established herself on a brocaded sofa, whose dull peacock-blues and gold made an ample background for her. Clara sat down beside a small table, on which presently Roberto put the coffee-tray. Morelli's eyes followed Clara, and rested on her; and now he went to take the cup from her hand for Mrs. Langham. Then she gave him one for himself, dropping four lumps of sugar into it, with a smile, not up at him, but apparently for herself.

Carleton did not drink coffee at night, under penalty of sleeplessness; but he went to get a cup from Miss Langham, and stood near her. Elizabeth lighted a cigarette and sat down at her writing-table. There were three little notebooks in a neat pile, just placed there by Roberto. She glanced over a few pages in each, added up some figures, made a few corrections; then took a sheet of paper and wrote, in her even, precise script, pausing now and then and glancing over her shoul-

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der at the group near the chimney-piece. Carleton watched her; the procedure was familiar. She was inspecting the accounts of the day, and making out the *menu* for the morrow. She did it easily and quickly; then rang for Roberto, gave him the books and paper, and apparently got rid then and there of housekeeping cares. In all the time he had stayed in the house before, Carleton had never seen more than this of the operating machinery. With apparently no more oversight than this, it had run smoothly, delightfully; except, to be sure, that there had been an occasional mild protest from the master of the house against Elizabeth's extravagance, which she had always vehemently denied. Now, Carleton reflected, she could be as extravagant as she liked; at least there was no one to protest.

She wore her freedom much better than she had worn the yoke. She seemed now entirely the *chate-laine*, entirely at ease, too, in the midst of her possessions; and this she had not been formerly. There was no one now to chafe her by the perpetual nervous prolixity of his discourse, to worry her with advice, sarcasm, or supervision, to hang

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the weight of age and outlived experience on the motions of her astonishingly youthful spirit. Elizabeth, at thirty-eight, was free to try her fortune.

It dawned on Carleton suddenly, as he stood absorbed in these reflections, that he was in the way; or that at least Morelli thought he was. Morelli, drinking his second cup of coffee and talking in Italian to Miss Langham, kept glancing up at the stranger, but not at all in a way to take him into the conversation. His frankness amused Carleton. He looked eminently good-humoured; and Carleton, too, was good-humoured. He moved away, and, at her invitation, sat down by Mrs. Langham. But he was sufficiently interested to keep an eye on the other two; and was rewarded by seeing that Morelli, after a rapid monologue in a low tone and some questions, answered in monosyllables by Clara, got up to go. He shook hands all round and said to Mrs. Craven:

“ I’m awfully sorry, but I have a consultation on the other side of town at ten o’clock. I’m afraid I shall be late.”

Elizabeth laughed—they all laughed.

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“Oh, impossible, Morelli,” drawled Mrs. Langham. “When were you ever late?”

He shrugged his shoulders with a careless, radiant air, and departed.

“What a clever creature he is!” said the beauty. “Really, he amuses me more than any person I know, almost. He was telling me about the new Princess Ruspoli——” She paused, glanced obliquely at Elizabeth, and laughed. “I’ll tell you something, if he doesn’t. But one thing she did I can tell you. They were lunching somewhere, she and the Principe, and he asked somebody to drive somewhere with him, and made an appointment for the afternoon. She spoke up and said, across the table: ‘Pardon me, the horses are mine, and I’m going to use them myself this afternoon.’ She’s an American,” added Mrs. Langham, looking at Carleton. “But she forgets that the Principe isn’t. I wonder what will happen to her? I back Ruspoli, any day.”

“What would be his proper procedure, in the circumstances?” enquired Carleton.

“Oh, it depends. They have been married about three months. Probably he will frighten

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her into giving him a separate establishment, in a few months more. He will live in Rome, and she won't be received anywhere. If she holds the purse-strings too tight, he will whisper that her mind is affected. It doesn't take long for that to get about. Then—who knows? Crazy people do queer things. Sometimes they do themselves injury—become violent, and have to be shut up——!”

“Augusta, you are lurid to-night. Don't give Mr. Carleton the idea that any such exciting things may happen. He'll be cruelly disappointed.”

“Oh, he may not. And then it's interesting, just 'waiting for the Sleary babies to develop Sleary's fits.' And sometimes they *do*. You ought to read the *Popolo Romano*—you'd see what things happen.” Mrs. Langham yawned slightly, and gave her empty cup to Carleton. “I'd like to be born an Italian. I think they get more out of life than we do. They live more intensely. And then they have so much back of them—all sorts of queer complications and undercurrents and things going on in the dark. It's drama—their life is—better plots than D'Annunzio makes.”

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She dropped her words evenly, monotonously, with an air rather of talking against time and not expecting anything from her listeners, except their attention. That, it was plain, she would take for granted.

Clara glanced up at Carleton as he set down the cup on the table. She had taken up some work—a little frame with a pattern of lace stretched on it—and now bent over it again. Her fingers moved swiftly, guiding a long needle in and out of the square meshes. She was wonderfully pictorial, he thought. And he wondered why she effaced herself so, leaving the whole centre of the floor, as it were, to her mother. Or was it, perhaps, only a more subtle way of drawing one's attention? It would have been, he concluded, if she had had any reason to be interested in himself. As it was, it probably meant just lack of interest. That was natural enough; Carleton felt that he had never been more stupid in his life.

He was glad now of Elizabeth's move. She dismissed him to bed, with a sympathetic note of his fatigue, and walked with him again along the corridor to the door of his room.

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“ Good-night—ring for your breakfast any time you want it,” she said. “ You’ll take a lot of resting, won’t you? ”

“ I’m afraid I shall,” he said ruefully. “ But I shan’t be so bad as this to-morrow. . . . It’s wonderful, being here—and you’re wonderfully good to me.”

He put her hand to his lips, and she left him, with a soft backward look.

It seemed to him as he flung himself into the great bed, which reared its mass on a dais till its head almost touched the ceiling, that he sank into his ineffable weariness as into a sea whose waves closed over him, obliterating thought and even sense. The silence was absolute. Even the fountain and the nightingale were on the other side of the house and inaudible. He sighed deeply and lay without moving. The air that blew in upon him had a drowsy coolness. It was poppy and mandragora from the fields of sleep. Peace, peace, quiet remoteness from the jar and jangle of life—this was what he had come to find, perhaps to ask of Elizabeth, for he could not find it alone.

### CHAPTER III

**I**T was this same air, warmed by the late May sun to a softer, more relaxing degree, that Carleton blamed for his languor next day. A night's sleep of ten solid hours had not prevented him from drowsing off again immediately after his late breakfast—in spite of the splendour of a blue-and-gilt morning and an infinity of things to interest his eye. He had found Elizabeth on the terrace in the shade of the cypresses, where there were always chairs and a table for writing, and almost always a breeze. She had left him for a few moments while she went in to see some visitors; and he awoke to see her sitting at a little distance, writing a letter. He sat up in his long wicker chair and uttered an apology.

“How long have you been there?” he enquired confusedly.

“About half an hour,” Elizabeth smilingly answered, laying down her pen. “Do you hate to have people see you asleep? I do. One never

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knows what one looks like. Fancy being seen sleeping with your mouth open—how idiotic one would look!”

“I hope I wasn’t,” said Carleton earnestly.

“No, indeed, or I should have waked you.”

“I wish you had. It’s ridiculous. I slept last night as I haven’t for years. It must be the air. It has certainly an indescribably languid quality.” Carleton half closed his eyes and breathed deeply.

“It’s not the air—it’s the relaxation of the bent bow,” said Elizabeth. “You must be idle now, and you’ll suffer the penalty of having worked. I’ve seen it before. You’ll go to pieces to a certain extent. I hope we can put you together again, though.”

“And make me young again? . . . Then you really have the magic caldron tucked away somewhere? I could almost swear I felt it at work already, melting my old bones. . . . Do you know how I feel? Like one of those twisted olive-trees when the spring begins to work in it and the sap to rise and swell its branches and strain its tough old bark!”

“Don’t sit up meanwhile in that decorously

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uncomfortable fashion," said Elizabeth. "That's the invalid chair, and you're now on my list of invalids. Lie down—and tell me what on earth you've been doing the last three—yes, three—years. It's about that time since you stopped writing me what you were doing."

She leaned back in her low chair and looked at him composedly. In a light morning-dress, with a white hat pulled down over her brows, she was—if not quite as pretty as in candle-light—yet sufficiently attractive to help Carleton out.

"You know why I stopped," he said with a steady gaze.

"No, I do not know. But it doesn't matter—I mean, I didn't intend to ask. I asked you——"

"But, Elizabeth, you must have known at the time. You've forgotten."

She smiled, rather bitterly.

"I haven't forgotten anything. There wasn't anything positive. You simply stopped writing me—I mean about yourself and your life, as you had been doing up to that time. It was natural enough—I'm not complaining, though I believe I did protest a little at the time——"

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“ But you know—it all seemed so hopeless then. I felt that I was bound down to the wheel for an indefinite time. I saw no chance of seeing you again for years to come. And meantime I must drudge along in the same round that you knew, and that couldn't be very interesting——”

“ Barry, you know better! You know that I was keenly interested; that I followed your work, and studied your politics, and did my best to know just what you were thinking, and doing, and living! But it grew tiresome to you—troublesome to tell me all I wanted to know. And you——” She pulled herself up. “ But here—this isn't what I meant! Tell me now, if it won't tire you, what the last three years have been—just briefly, I mean. What have you been doing, to hollow your face and wear out your nerves? ”

“ Working, and—well, gambling,” said Carleton.

“ Oh, gambling? ”

“ Yes. It was like this. As you know, I went back to America because of my father's death. I should have had to go anyhow because of the financial smash that followed. Up to the time I was

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twenty-five, I'd never worked at all—that is, I mean I hadn't earned any money. Then I found myself with three people to support. My mother had a very small property left. My sister was young, pretty, and gay. . . . Well, all this you know, and about my newspaper work. I did work like the devil, those first two years. I threw myself into it, into the study of the city—first just as a phenomenon, seen from a foreign point of view. Then as I got more intimate with its conditions my work became less sociology and more definitely politics. . . . Then I ceased to write you details. They would have been practical and rather sordid details—the story of a long, slow fight against the usual brand of corruption. It wasn't a spectacular fight. The men that were doing it weren't picturesque. I couldn't have made it interesting. And then—I was getting tired. I was losing my—well, what ambition I'd had. I was deadly tired of the newspaper mill, of business policy, of being tied down to say just so much of what I wanted to say as would be safe, and to earn so much money every month. What could I do?"

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Carleton stopped to light a cigar. Elizabeth was listening intently.

“I couldn’t get free except by making some money—a good deal. I knew nothing about business or any other profession, even if I could have started in, at thirty, without capital. I did know something about the stock-market, as most newspaper men do. I began to study it hard. I speculated a little, week by week, for two years. I made small profits, seldom losing. I increased my mother’s property by about a third. . . . Then, last winter, I went in hard. I knew a man, a rich fellow, who let me in on the first thing. Then—I played as high as I could. I was playing for a decent amount of freedom—and risking hopeless slavery. . . . I pulled it off. I made enough in that winter, boiled down into safe securities, to give my mother a comfortable little income. My sister has married rather well. And I—well, I have about enough to live on, for myself. At least,” he added, “I shall have to live on it! I wouldn’t go through this last year again for any amount of money.”

He lay back in the chair and re-lighted his cigar,

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which had gone out. Then he held up the burnt match with a smile. It shook in his fingers like a leaf in the wind.

“That’s what it did for me,” he commented. “You see, I’m not a money-making sort. Heaven knows what I was made for; but at least it wasn’t *that*. It was all dead against the grain.”

Elizabeth nodded slowly.

“I can believe it. The wonder is you could do it at all, with your temperament and training. How *could* you do it, Barry? I used to think you could never do anything—anything practical, I mean. You seemed never to have the will for it—never to use your will, to make yourself do anything. But this must have been sheer will.”

“Yes,—at the last it was, at least—sheer will. I made use of that egotism you were always accusing me of—I must have a frightful amount now, if it grows by use!”

“I wonder if it does? I called you an egotist because you were always so completely yourself, so conscious of yourself, your character, and all. You were never uncertain! But not because you used

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that force for any definite end. You never did that."

"No, not then. But I have done it since. I've used it all—used it up, I think. I don't seem to have any left."

"Any egotism?"

"Yes—or any will."

Elizabeth pondered.

"But, at any rate, you're free now. You're a success," she said suddenly.

Carleton laughed, not altogether sweetly.

"Oh, a wonderful success!" He brooded over it for a little. "Yes, wonderful. I dropped what work I was doing as soon as I could. I used to think I cared whether the second city of our country had a decent administration or was ruled by a band of thieves. I used to think decency was worth fighting for, inch by inch. I used to write and lecture about municipal problems. I used to think I'd get into the game—'public life,' you know,—for the public good. . . . Well, now you see how much in earnest I was."

"Oh, about politics.—You were very young when you went back—you were, really, astonish-

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ingly young. It was natural you should have enthusiasms. But real success I call your getting out of that environment. You took the only way out. It was clever of you! I never thought you were at all practical. But you did a difficult thing—I admire you for it. You might have stuck in that quicksand all your life—buried in it. And now you're free!"

"Yes, free," he murmured. Then he blew out a great cloud of smoke and said suddenly: "You're perfectly sure that you're doing the right thing, aren't you? Your life here, I mean. You don't feel cut off from anything?"

Elizabeth looked at him, unable for a moment to reply.

"If you mean," she said finally, "living here rather than in America, I'm quite sure. I couldn't live there. You see, don't you?"

His glance rested on her a moment, then roved slowly over her background—the noble dark cypresses that towered up over the boundary-wall and cut sharply the burning blue of the sky. They stood seemingly on the edge of an abyss of air, for the hill shelved sharply down, the valley was invis-

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ible from where Carleton sat, and only the hills on the far side climbed into view, painted thick with purple shades. Carleton got up and went to the edge of the terrace and leaned on the wall. Little lizards darted away among the crevices of the ancient stones. Somewhere in the fields below a cuckoo was calling in a perfect Swiss-clock voice. He listened for the vicious slam of the clock-door, which had always followed the voice at home, and smiled as a vision of "home" rose before him. He was fond of his mother; but "home" had meant, for the last five years, one varnished and comfortless flat after another, with a succession of unprofitable servants.

There lay the city, crowding about the Dome, which rose, straining at its moorings as a soap-bubble strains away from the pipe into an obloid shape. There was beauty, there were endless memories. Carleton turned and glanced again over the terrace, where the sunlight lay heavy on the gravel; up at the light façade of the house; down at the garden wall, within which the *fontanella* sang to itself.

A new music broke on his ear. It came appar-

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ently from somewhere near, but outside, the house. A piano, smitten with strength, gave it forth—a music sonorous, weighty and formal, beginning with a majestic prelude and going on as though it meant to continue indefinitely.

Carleton approached Elizabeth, who, her head bent, was disturbing the fine gravel at her feet with the point of a bronze slipper.

“I haven’t been into the garden yet—will you take me?” he asked.

“Willingly.”

They walked toward the house. Its front was continuous, in Italian fashion, with the garden-wall, and the wall of a courtyard, and the front of the stables beyond. The door into the courtyard was open. Elizabeth nodded toward it.

“That’s Clara at her music. Come and see.”

“But we may disturb her, I suppose,” objected Carleton.

“She won’t see us. I want you to see the new music-room.”

It was a separate building, at one side of the court—a single large room with vaulted ceiling, some seats at one end and Clara at the piano at the

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other. The girl's back was toward the door. Her white dress, her black, heavy knot of hair, her head bent forward over the keyboard, her hands beating out a series of tremendous clashing chords, gave Carleton a mixed impression of grace and energy. He turned away, after one look.

"She plays Bach quite amazingly well," said Elizabeth as they retreated. "She plays for me every Friday—my day. Really, she's almost a professional, you see. It's been her ambition, and she has played in public a few times. But, poor girl, she hasn't the nerves for it—or, rather, she has too many."

"Has she? She doesn't look ill, though—and it must take various kinds of strength to play that sort of thing."

"Oh, she's not ill—at least, not now. But it's a hair-trigger kind of organization—a question of delicate balance—over-balance, sometimes. She can stand a good deal of hard work—but the excitement of playing in concert throws her quite out. Last time she broke down, poor child, in the middle of her programme. It was in London, last winter. It must have been quite awful, the effect

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on her. In fact, she's hardly got over it yet. Her mother wrote me about it, and I asked them to come here immediately. But Clara wouldn't, till she had pulled herself together. Then went to Rome instead. Mrs. Langham hates London."

"The girl's nerves don't come from that side of the family, I suppose," said Carleton. "I should say Mrs. Langham had about as many as a marble Roman."

Elizabeth laughed. "She thinks she has them, though," she said in a low voice. She stopped just inside the garden door and pointed up at a line of open windows. "Those are her rooms. She's about the serious business of the day. Do you know that woman's toilette takes three mortal hours every morning? She never appears till one. But *then* she's presentable for the next twelve hours. She won't change her gown more than three times in the course of the day—perhaps only twice, if it's just ourselves. And she will look—well, as you saw her last night. Oh, it's worth the three hours! Besides, she's nothing else to do."

They went on past the wall where the jasmine and roses clung, between rows of orange trees in

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great earthenware pots, down a long, leisurely flight of stone steps, broken by several landings. On the different terraces grew masses of shrubs and small trees, many in flower and fragrant under the hot sun. In the centre of the garden was the fountain, half in shadow. Its surface was covered with lily and lotos-pads, under which lurked gold-fish with long, prismatic, fringe-like fins.

They sat down in the shade on the stone rim of the fountain. Carleton looked about him for some moments thoughtfully. The place was silent, for the bulk of the house was between them and the piano—they could no longer hear it. They were out of eye-shot of the windows, too, behind a row of lemon-trees. He laid his hand on Elizabeth's.

“Yes, I see—you could never go back,” he said, answering the question he had asked out there on the terrace. “I don't know why the idea occurred to me—except that it seemed to me you must, after all, be rather lonely here.”

“Perhaps,” she said, after a pause, drawing away a little from his light touch. “But I should hardly be less lonely anywhere else. Plenty of people come to me here.”

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“ Yes, they come—and they go.”

“ I shouldn’t want all of them to stay! ”

“ No, nor any of them, perhaps. That’s just it.”

“ But they entertain me immensely! I like new people. And some I am really fond of, like Clara. I hope she will marry Morelli.”

“ Marry *him*? Why do you hope so? ”

“ Oh, she ought to marry, and she likes him, and he is madly in love with her. Also, he is a very clever man, and I like him, too, very much. I rather think I shall leave them my money, if they marry. At least, I shall give Clara a dowry, for he’s poor and she has only a little.”

“ They look like rich people—the mother and daughter, I mean.”

“ Ah, their dress—they know how to do it. And then Mrs. Langham has a good deal—but she’ll always need it all.”

“ I should think you’d find her rather a—white elephant on your hands,” said Carleton lazily. “ She’s really on an heroic scale, isn’t she? ”

“ Oh, I wouldn’t have her, if it wasn’t for Clara. But Clara won’t go anywhere without her. Of course, Augusta is something to show

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off—people like to come and look at her. But she is so bored here, and I can't give her what she likes—it doesn't fit in with my quiet life. I suppose you saw that she looked you over and rejected you? She doesn't like American men, anyway."

"I wasn't aware that I was offered to her," said Carleton, rather piqued. "She doesn't interest me."

"But Clara does?"

"Suppose, now, we stop talking about your relatives—will you? The person I happen to be interested in just now is yourself."

"Myself? I'm even less interesting than I was three years ago, when you—forgot all about me. I've become what you see—a placid old dowager, busy with the love affairs of the young people. You must let me arrange one for you."

"That," said Carleton, "is what I came over for."

"Ah, no, my dear!" said Elizabeth with a little agitated laugh. "You came because you'd got some money, and a nervous break-down!"

"Well, I couldn't have come if I hadn't got

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some money, could I?" Carleton asked steadily. "I came as soon as I could, didn't I? . . . As to forgetting you—you can understand, can't you, how just then it all seemed hopeless?"

Elizabeth stood up hastily; she fairly took to flight.

"I must go—luncheon—there are some people coming," she said in a voice that trembled for all her effort. And she started on ahead of Carleton so that he should not see her eyes. On the first landing he stopped.

"I'll go back there until lunch-time, I think," he said.

"Very well. Lunch is at one. You'll find a bench somewhere in the shade."

And, even now not meeting his look, she went on up the steps.

Carleton went back, and stood for some moments staring down at the lilies in the fountain. Then he became aware that the sun was boring a hole between his shoulders, and turned aside into a shaded walk. He took the first stone seat at hand, threw off his hat, and clasped his hands at the back of his neck, where the familiar gnawing

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pain was at work again. His few minutes in the sun this morning had brought it back—or had it never really left him at all? The old feeling of absolute uselessness came back with it.

“I’m a nice fellow to be making love!” he thought disgustedly. “No wonder she wouldn’t have it. . . . And yet, why wouldn’t she?”

A perception of the reason why she wouldn’t made itself clear in spite of him. He felt sick, sorry, and ashamed. She was right—it had been forced. He had forced himself to begin to say things. But Carleton had got so used to forcing himself that he asked now, rather aghast, How was he ever to do or say anything more, if he was expected to be perfectly spontaneous? Life was an effort, had been for years, and was still. It must continue to be, or else stop altogether, he thought. Elizabeth was unreasonable, if she expected the fresh ardour of a boy. . . .

Carleton wearily sounded his heart, and discovered that he really did not want to make the effort to live. He did not really want anything at all. But he had believed that Elizabeth wanted *him*; he had vaguely intended to live for her sake.

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Now, did she at all want him, or was it only that she did not want him, as it were, in fragments?

Well, it was evident, at any rate, that he was not to force himself to make love to her. Certainly, if he could take her on a basis of clear, unsentimental liking, it would be easier—at any rate, for a time.

“And, by Jove,” was his resolution, “if I ever *do* say anything more, she shall stay and listen!”

He was irritated, and at the same time grateful to her for running away. He did not want any emotions, unless they might be of the perfectly primitive sort, as purely sensuous, as immediate and transitory, as the effect of the air's softness or the jasmine's perfume. In his relaxed state he was peculiarly susceptible to things of the sense—to the beauty of the earth, of art, and of women. And he wanted just to enjoy all of these that came easily.

It had begun—his enjoyment—with the long, calm southern voyage, and the day at Naples had flung wide the gate for him. Something he had seen on the hill of Posilippo recurred now, as it often had in the meantime—a glimpse of feminine

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and of Italian charm. As his cab passed a doorway in a high wall, a woman, dressed in black, with black drapery over her head, young and graceful, came out, and turned to take leave of a young girl. She took the girl's chin in her hand, and turned the small face and kissed both its cheeks, with a slow, sweet movement of her veiled head. Sweet, sweet it was! Carleton dwelt on the picture with speculative, regretful pleasure. If only all these Italian days might have that suggestion of surprise, of romance, adventure!

## CHAPTER IV

**M**ORELLI came to luncheon—late, after the rest of them had gone to the table—and Carleton studied him with some attention. A seat had been kept for him next to Miss Langham, and the information that he was in love with her seemed to Carleton quite superfluous. One had only to look at him to see. As for Clara, she had the perfectly non-committal manner that women know. Apparently she found him agreeable.

And that he was an attractive person Carleton could not deny. His air of energy, of buoyant vitality, of frank good humour, was immensely taking. He seemed full of iron and electricity. His reddish-brown hair and eyes and fair skin, and his wiry litheness—he was as quick in motion as a lizard—spoke of a mixed strain; and, in fact, he had some English blood. But his gaiety and expressiveness were altogether Italian. He had a

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great deal of social cleverness. Carleton marked the tonic effect of his entrance on the rather languid party assembled, and saw his obvious popularity.

It was by no means a formal party. There was an English art-critic with his wife, and also an English girl who was writing a book on some obscure Renaissance painter. She talked to the art-critic about the progress of symbols; and Carleton talked with the art-critic's wife, a fair, delicate, vehement little creature, about her husband. Mrs. Langham appeared with a long, loose white wrap over her shoulders, and an enormous white hat. The massy ripples of her hair looked as immutable as a Japanese head-dress. She sat with one elbow on the table and talked vaguely with the other visitor—a young American whom Carleton knew slightly and disliked for his acidity.

Elizabeth, at the head of the table, appeared impersonal and detached. She no longer had any vestige of the American manner of the hostess. Her guests caused her no concern. Carleton had not been introduced to anybody. No one, apparently, noticed him as a stranger. Nobody tried to

entertain him, or to talk up or down to him. Something of the feeling of the night before came back to him. He began to feel rather happy again.

After luncheon, and coffee on the terrace, the party abruptly dissolved. Elizabeth and Mrs. Langham were going to drive into town. The art-critic and the English girl disappeared to pore over Craven's photographs of decayed paintings, in the library. The Englishman's wife went home, and took Gardner, the young American, who, it appeared, was staying with them. Clara and Morelli went off into the garden. Elizabeth offered to take Carleton if he wished.

"I don't suppose, though, that you want to go sight-seeing yet—or even shopping with us," she said. "There's any amount of time, you know."

"Then I'll waste a little here alone," he decided.

"Yes, till four—then there'll be tea in the *salotto*, and music afterward. Clara will play for us."

He watched her drive away and the gates close behind her, and found himself solitary. It wasn't

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exactly what he had expected. He was treated, really, in quite a casual way; like any other wayfarer; taken in and fed and made free of the place, and left alone. His coming, after all, had apparently made not a ripple in Elizabeth's way of life. Her life was full, too, evidently; and she had not pushed aside anything or anybody to make a place for him.

And he had expected—yes, really—to take at once the first, main place. He had thought that they would have at once some of those long, intimate talks that had brought them so—dangerously—close together, five years since; and that very soon they would arrive at an understanding.

After all, it was rather soon to judge. This might be only Elizabeth's great kindness, or tact—letting him find his own level, and meanwhile making him feel uncommitted. He was in her house, and, above all, she was now free. Something of the reserve of a young girl was perhaps forced upon her. He was relieved—yet in a way disappointed, too. If a frank arrangement could only have been made! He thought the arrange-

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ment would suit him very well; but he was emphatically not of a wooing mind.

He returned to his long chair on the terrace with a cigar and a late French review, but did not read. The languor of the day and the place lay heavy upon him, with a sweet oppression. It was not hot, except in the direct sun, and there was a cool breeze. The season, in fact, was very late; spring was lingering in the green wheat and the black, chilly cypress. But the saturated quality of the Italian air was as deeply relaxing as a much greater heat in America would have been. Carleton gazed up at the lapis-lazuli sky, where a few white clouds floated like distended sponges, and where even the most deeply blue spaces were veiled with moisture. He had never seen, he reflected, a perfectly clear Italian sky. Saturation, gravidity, richness was its physical quality, and the mental atmosphere of the land as well. Infinite richness of association, layer upon layer of lives lived out on this spot, foundations far down in the impenetrable deep, built up slowly, slowly, to make a little space for this generation to live, and love, and die upon. And those myriads of lives had left Beauty

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behind them. Beauty everywhere—in the lines and groups of cypresses, in stone and mortar, paint and plaster, brick and bronze. How had they done it, and why was it that modern Italy had the worst taste in the world? . . . And was it true that Clara would marry Morelli? She seemed quite an American young lady, in spite of her foreign bringing up. They had gone away unchaperoned, perfectly as a matter of course. . . .

They came back in about half an hour, and Morelli rushed off with a vivacious word or two for Carleton, who had risen. He hoped that Clara would sit down and talk to him, and after a moment's hesitation she did so.

He was struck by the sadness of her face. Its physical type was pensive, poetic; it was extremely expressive, and just now it expressed a melancholy by far too intense for so young a creature. She did not think it necessary to assume any cheerfulness on Carleton's account, or to smile as she spoke in subdued, nervous phrases. He asked her whether she could work in this enervating atmosphere without too great an effort, noting the while

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that she looked pale and tired; noting, also, the velvety softness of her eyes, whose colour he could not quite make out.

“It does take more effort than it ought, perhaps,” she acknowledged. “But one must do something.”

“And perhaps it would be harder still to do something less interesting?”

“Yes.”

“And do you like playing for Mrs. Craven’s people, as she tells me you do every week?”

“I wish to play before people as much as possible. I suffer from stage-fright,” she said. “I don’t know if it can be overcome in that way—but one can only try.”

“I should think,” said Carleton at random, “that that would depend a good deal on one’s general strength.”

“Yes, I suppose so. And yet I am rather strong.”

“Perhaps if you dropped all work and got into a bracing air you might get very much stronger—and forget your nervousness.”

Clara looked at him gravely, then smiled with

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some amusement. Possibly she was not much used to just this tone—this combination of obvious interest in her as a person, with apparent impersonality—nor to advice so frankly offered.

“Perhaps so,” she said. “Do you find this air so very enervating? But I suppose we shall none of us be staying here long.”

“No? Why not?”

“Because it will get hot, and Mrs. Craven flies from Florence with the first hot days. The summer is unusually late this year.”

“And where do you all go then?”

“I do not know. Somewhere up in the hills, I think,—at least, I should like that best,—some quiet little place. My mother likes rather more amusement, though, so we may go to Switzerland.”

Carleton could not help smiling at this.

“Forgive me, but you talk as though you were a hundred and ten,” he said. “Don’t you like amusement?”

“Some kinds,” said Clara indifferently.

“Well, will you tell me what kinds?”

“It depends. If I am in the mood, I like soci-

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ety—if it is gay enough. But not for long. I don't like to be on parade for a whole day even. I don't like rushing about."

"Of course not—'*Es bildet sich ein Talent in der Stille.*'"

"Yes; but I don't take my *Talent* so seriously. It is only a pastime, after all."

She looked away as she said this, pressing her full lips together. Carleton looked curiously at her. There was more than an undertone of bitterness in the last speech. He referred it immediately to what Elizabeth had told him of—ambition frustrated by physical weakness. He felt very sorry for her. And yet, after all, why could she *not* take her music as a pastime? Why should she want a professional career? She was a young girl, with definite and unusual charm—with a rare kind of beauty. And she must have opportunities enough in society. He was struck as he had not been hitherto by the elegance of her dress. It was still white—a thin embroidered stuff,—and she wore a lacy white hat that curved down at the back and rippled in shell-like curves over her black hair. She was as smart, in a different way, as her mother.

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And, though a young woman with a hidden grief, she was evidently not minded to waste a single one of her attractions.

“ I suppose it is the best pastime, though—to make beauty live and breathe again. The pastime of the gods—or some of them—the most decent ones,” he laughed.

“ Oh, it is quite a respectable occupation. One might do much worse,” said Clara. “ It is rather exacting, that is the worst of it. I must go and rest now—I have to play at four.”

Carleton walked with her to the door, and went himself into the drawing-room to look about at the things he vaguely remembered—the pictures and embroideries, books in Siense bindings, some carvings of value, some old French furniture. They differed from the spoil heaped up in the rich houses at home, in that there were not too many of them; that they were all somehow related, and had a relation to the room and the house. And, then, they all reminded Carleton of happy days—here at the villa and scattered through his four *Wanderjahre*, when he had floated gaily and alone about Europe, tramping through the country, bur-

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rowing into some old city, enjoying his chance adventures, feeding full his senses, loafing and inviting his soul. He breathed a deep sigh to feel how far out of reach all that was now—how completely he had left his youth behind; how work and responsibility—and time, doubtless—had taken it out of him.

He was but thirty, to be sure, and Elizabeth must be—yes, he knew exactly how old she was, of course. She had told him that, and everything else, in the old, confidential days. Did she begin the confidences of herself, or was it he, with his infernal faculty of interest in other people's affairs, and his sympathy, that drew her out and on? At any rate, he had very soon found himself consoler of an unhappy wife, in a marriage that was no marriage.

Elizabeth was a Puritan, body and soul. All that was uncontrolled about her was her tongue. Therefore, though she had told him her most intimate affairs, and her husband's, and they had spent many long hours and days together in an atmosphere more or less suffused with emotion, though she had said she loved him, and he was very much

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interested in her, things had ended just there. Carleton had never told her, either, that he loved her; because he did not, and he was too sincere and self-conscious to confuse matters, or to be carried away by a moment's feeling. He had only two things to regret in their relation—it had prevented him from knowing James Craven as well as he would have liked to know him, and it had put an additional shade of coolness, at the time, between husband and wife.

Craven had been extremely interesting to him, intellectually; a scholar he was, of the old Florentine, or pagan, type; a man who had as good a brain as Carleton had ever encountered with, and as good a heart as, in the French phrase, could be made out of brains. Craven had been calmly proud of retaining, within sight of his eightieth year, his ability to work, his hair, teeth, eyesight, and capacity for good living. He had been fastidiously intolerant of any physical weakness in other people, and oddly tolerant of emotional weakness, so long as it did not disturb the full and quiet current of his days. He had given Elizabeth perfect freedom—and an atmosphere to live in as

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warm as that above the moon. Elizabeth had not been able to use the freedom he gave her. She was an idealist. She was frozen, starved, by his perfectly pagan spirit; and she made him, at times, uncomfortable by her revolt. Hence his coolness to Carleton, who understood that Craven had thought *his* part in the *menage á trois* ill-performed. Craven had made it perfectly plain, however, that he, Carleton, was welcome in the house. All the old man had wanted was to be left in peace among his treasures and his little daily enjoyments of food, wine, sunshine, and talk with the brother-savants who visited him. He had not wanted to talk much to Carleton, who at twenty-five was too much in the spirit of youth.

Carleton's regret for this lack of interest in him, and for the disturbances he caused, was honest as the day—he had immensely irritated Elizabeth, then, by expressing it. But then he had not wanted to make himself the chief person in her life. It was Elizabeth herself, with her passionate longing for life, love, and youth, who had wished that.

At dinner that night Carleton found himself

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alone with her, in the big room, dimly lit and full of fragrance from the garden. She was dressed for him with all the art she knew—in black, that brought out the beautiful colour of her hair and the bright fairness of her shoulders and arms. He saw that it was to be a gay occasion—Elizabeth's kind of gaiety—which might be serious. She was glowing, her eyes and lips brilliant; every motion, every look, spoke her intense consciousness of him, her pleasure in his nearness.

“My ladies,” she said as they went to the table, “have gone out to dine. It isn't very often that they're asked together—so I seize the chance of a good talk with you. . . . Do you remember how we used to talk? Hours and hours. You never did anything else in those days.”

“No, and now I shall do nothing else. But perhaps I've lost the ability to talk.”

“We shall see. Now, tell me first, what do you think of me?”

“I think you're beautiful.”

“Ah! do you? I'm glad you can say it, anyway! . . . But that's not what I mean. I want your impression as a whole—whether I have

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changed; what you think of me, my life, the place here, the people, all——” she ended breathlessly.

“I can’t quite put all those together. You—I can’t see that you’ve changed. At first I thought you more calm, more quiet; but to-night you seem exactly as you were—except that you’re handsomer, I think.”

“I thought you would find me forlorn, melancholy, bored—all that!”

“If you are, you haven’t let me see it. You seem to me to be occupied and content.”

“Content!”

“Not exactly, either,” he went on quickly, “for I can see you’re halting just now. I’m convinced that your future will be something different from this. And you don’t yet know what it will be. Am I right?”

“Yes, yes,” cried Elizabeth, “I do feel that. But, then, I’ve always felt it! I mean that something startling would come into my life. For years it seemed to me perfectly impossible that I could go on, from day to day, as I was doing, so quietly, in such monotony. It seemed to me that

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something *must* happen. And now I have the feeling of romance, of infinite possibilities, just as keenly. . . . It seems to me that I haven't yet begun to live—but that I might begin at any moment!"

Her eyes, rather feverishly bright, met his eagerly. She was leaning forward, her elbows on the table, leaving her soup untasted. He sat at her right, and this proximity, with the rest of the table empty, with the soft, pure, unshaded flames of the Venetian lamp for the only light in the room, was exciting to them both.

"Ah, now I recognize you, indeed!" he cried. "I wondered if you had lost your sense of adventure—or perhaps satisfied it."

"Neither! I have it, and it will never be satisfied. I shall die without living! Oh, how I hate, hate to grow old! I am thirty-eight!"

"Don't be tragic about it. I don't know that the literal number of years means very much."

"Oh, Barry, be honest! It means everything. It means as much to me as it does to Augusta Langham! More, perhaps, for she has had the joy of her beauty, even if she has to lose it—and

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I, what have I had? I am losing my chance—that's all I have ever had, a chance! And I am losing that!"

"Elizabeth, I could imagine I had never left La Fontanella! This is exactly as it used to be."

"Yes, when James had gone out to some deadly old historical dinner! Ah, poor man! he hadn't much peace with me."

She was silent a moment; put out her hand for her glass of champagne, and drank it slowly.

"How tragic life is. Some of us live too long—and we grow old . . . and then we drop out, and it is as though we had never lived. Youth is the only thing that matters—the only happiness! And I threw mine away."

Roberto took the soup plates; and Elizabeth had to help herself to meat and vegetables. She went on talking, in the security of her alien tongue, putting no guard, however, on her look and manner. Her former quiet was gone, like a thin crust of ice before the sun; she was as restlessly vehement as ever.

"I spent all my life with old people. First my

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father—I can't remember him when he wasn't old; then my husband—I doubt if he was ever young. . . . He was like another father. And so I am younger now than I have any right to be, and I suffer for it. I ought to be settled now. I ought to have lived my life. And I have never had it. How I envy you, Barry!"

"And why, pray?"

"Why, because you are young, and a man, and can choose——"

"I am not young any more. You said it yourself yesterday. I'm a hundred and fifty."

"Oh, don't be absurd! Don't put on the air of a greybeard, just because you happen to be a little fagged. I won't have *you* grow old. . . . I believe you have had some experience that you haven't told me—some serious affair."

Carleton laughed gaily.

"On my honour, I haven't. But——"

"But what? Tell me what has happened to you—do tell me! How can we go on, with all this gulf of years between us? You are a stranger to me now. I used to feel that I knew you, knew your heart. You were transparent, clear, nothing

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had touched you. No woman had had as much of you as I had, then. But now! There is something, I know. . . . In five years!"

"Nothing, honestly—nothing important!"

"'But?' You said 'but'——"

"'But *you*,' I started to say!"

"And you have not—you really haven't—fallen in love with anyone—not even yet? You've never been in love?"

"Not, at any rate, since I left you."

"And you are thirty years old! What are you waiting for, Barry?"

"For you, I think, Elizabeth."

She drank off her wine hastily. Her hands shook, her colour rose, and for a moment she could not meet his eyes.

"It isn't fair of you," she murmured.

"Why? Not fair? Is there anything on your side? In all these years?"

"You need not ask—and you know it."

"Then your fate is still to come."

"My fate? My fate is to wither up here at La Fontanella. Who would care for me now?"

"I would," said Carleton.

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“ Ah, we’re talking a different language. Who would *love* me? Would you? Ah, no! you are too old, too tired, isn’t that it? You would come to me and say, ‘ Here, we two middle-aged people may as well plod on the rest of the way together.’ Isn’t that what you feel? ”

She stopped. Her eyes glittered; she looked straight at him now, and he cooled.

“ No matter what I feel,” he said, addressing himself to his dinner, which had been much neglected, “ I don’t intend to tell you now.”

Elizabeth laughed nervously.

“ No, . . . of course not. You are honest, Barry, and I love you for it. You are dear to me—very dear. And you haven’t changed. At first I thought I had lost you; but now I feel that you are just as you were, that you still like me a little; all is as it should be. We shall have some happy times together—and when I go for the summer you will come, too, won’t you? I’d thought of going to England——”

“ I’ll go with you, of course, if you’ll take me. Elizabeth, you know you’re more interesting to me than anyone in the world.”

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“Am I, am I Barry? But it won't always be so. . . . You'll fall in love, and then——”

“That idea haunts you, Elizabeth. Will anything happen to me that hasn't already happened?”

“Ah, yes, yes! . . . Just the fact that all these years you haven't had any serious affair—that you've *never* had any—shows what it will be when you *do*.”

“What will it be, dear? How shall I know? Shall I turn green, or blue, lose my appetite, or——”

“Oh, you can jest at scars—it only shows how untouched you are! Honestly, haven't you yet seen a woman you want to marry?”

“None but you.”

“Never! I wouldn't marry you, Barry, unless you were in love with me. Another man I might, but not *you*. . . .”

She drank a third glass of champagne, and put her hand on his.

“But do stay with me till you fall in love! I won't bore you. You know I'm very, very fond

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of you. But love—! *On ne badine pas avec l'Amour!* . . .”

Elizabeth's eyes had grown brightly misty.

“We shall have many little dinners like this,” she said. “I adore dining with you. It's just as it used to be—I wouldn't have believed that it could be! But you are the same. I love you, because you are so good. I feel that you understand me, that you really *know*, no matter what I say or do; and you treat me, too, as another human being, not just as a woman——”

Here she bent forward and kissed his cheek.

“Elizabeth!” he murmured.

Roberto came in to put the dessert on the table. Elizabeth had not eaten much; but now she took some fruit and ate it thirstily, and drank yet another glass of champagne.

“Elizabeth—we must always be together,” murmured Carleton.

She shook her head.

“Till—the deluge! Come, let us go up and have coffee! . . . How sweet that jasmine is!”

She got up, and paused, leaning against the casement.

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“Let us go this way,” Carleton said.

She took his arm, and they went out on the balcony and down the steps into the garden. The night was rather dark, in spite of the stars and a ridiculously young moon that tilted its thin, silver line above the long, tiled roof of the tool-house at the foot of the garden. There were many night-moths about, and bats, and a few fireflies in the grass. The air was cool. Clouds were gathering that looked like rain. Elizabeth pressed close to Carleton and shivered.

“You’re cold,” he said, stopping. “Come back.”

“No. Let’s go on; but we won’t sit down. The air is chilly. . . .”

They stopped a moment by the fountain, and Elizabeth suddenly bent down and plunged her hands into the water.

“Ah, how cold it is!” she cried. “Give me your handkerchief, Barry!”

She shivered as she dried her hands.

“Come in now,” he said authoritatively, and he put his arm around her and drew her away.

“You need somebody to take care of you, that’s clear.”



*“Elizabeth suddenly bent down and plunged her hands into the water.”*



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“The jasmine!” she murmured, stopping once more. “It’s too sweet—I don’t like it! . . .”

They went on, out of the garden and round by the hall to the library. Here coffee was set out, and Elizabeth poured it, and began to smoke in silence. Her colour had faded by now, and the sudden reaction from her mood of expansiveness, which was hers alone, had come.

“England,” she said finally in a low voice. “I wonder how it would do for you—the summer there. Would you like it, I wonder?”

“Why not? Or perhaps,” said Carleton, “some little place up here in the hills? Are the Langhams to be with you?”

“No—why do you ask?”

“I wondered if they were a permanent attachment.”

“Not in the least. I should like to give Clara a home—something she’s never had, poor child! But I could not stand Augusta—nor could she stand me. She would be glad to be rid of Clara; but Clara will not leave her. She has resolved never to marry.”

“Out of devotion for the mother? But I thought you said——”

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“ Oh, it was only my hope that she would marry Morelli. . . . Barry, I may as well tell you about the Langhams now, for you’ll hear the pretty story from some of our gossips soon.”

“ Ah! there *is* a story, then. She looks it.”

“ Augusta? Yes. Oh, she has—or had—an international fame. And it isn’t to be lived down. The name doesn’t mean anything to you? ”

Carleton shook his head and she talked on with nervous rapidity.

“ Well, you wouldn’t remember. It was fifteen years ago that the thing happened, at Mentone. Charles Langham shot and killed a young Italian, Giulio Malaspina, and killed himself. Both died instantly. Malaspina had made himself fearfully conspicuous with Augusta. You can imagine what she was then, to look at. He was madly in love with her—and so, unfortunately, was her husband. He was a man of intensely emotional nature, so I heard, and more than a little unbalanced mentally. At least his jealousy is supposed to have unbalanced him quite. That he was insane at the time, Augusta has firmly insisted; and there is more or less evidence to bear her out, I suppose, in the way

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it happened. Whether Langham's suspicion of her was founded or not, I don't know; but, in any case, she was incredibly foolish. Of course, she was ruined socially. The scandal was everywhere. Her own family absolutely threw her off—Mr. Craven among others. He never mentioned her to me. This happened, of course, before my marriage. But other people told me the story—as they always do, you know.”

Carleton nodded in silence.

“Clara, I am told, is exactly like her father,” Elizabeth went on. “The same excitable and melancholy temperament, the same sensitiveness. I have met people who knew him, and who, when they ventured to speak of him, couldn't say enough in praise of him. He seems to have had a charming personality, and friends everywhere. And this was one thing that made it so impossible for Augusta afterward. . . . Of course, if he *was* insane, and had merely imagined it all, it has been a terrible injustice to her. For the world believes that she was responsible, at any rate, for the tragedy.”

“And Clara?” said Carleton.

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“She believes, for all one knows, her mother’s version. She is consistent about it. She not only insists that her mother shall be received everywhere *she* is, but she appears to think her possible inheritance of insanity a reason for not marrying.”

“Good Lord!” murmured Carleton. “And is *that* what she carries about with her? No wonder she—what a horrible story.”

“Ah, I remember you never liked to hear tragedies. But this, you see, you must have heard, anyhow. All our dear people about here know it. Some of them have even remonstrated with me for having her stay here. It isn’t that they’re all so awfully conventional, either; but she’s disliked. Augusta doesn’t humble herself, as you see. Not that they’d like her any better if she did. But they’d like to humble her—for one thing, on account of her beauty, I suppose. It’s a pity she’s had to waste it all these years, isn’t it, living in the shade?”

“A great pity,” said Carleton harshly.

Elizabeth looked at him with sharp scrutiny.

“I’m sorry I told you to-night,” she said petulantly. “I remember you always used to be upset

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by that sort of thing—‘hard-luck stories,’ as you called them. It is hard luck for Clara. . . . You haven’t said how you liked her playing.”

“I liked it very much,” said Carleton with an effort. “But wasn’t that Bach thing rather heavy, for the audience?”

“She doesn’t do it for the audience. Anyhow, it comes to be educated. This is the third Friday I’ve had her play the Bach thing. They’re beginning to listen to it now. I saw that you really listened.”

“Yes. I’m partly educated. Chicago’s a musical place, you know. I belong to the half of it that subscribes to concerts.”

The sentimental mood was quite gone. Elizabeth tried to recapture it, but in vain. Again and again she regretted the move that had, she thought, spoiled it all; but to this she made no further allusion. The effect on Carleton had rather frightened her. An instinct that lurked (when it did not rage) in her, a perpetually watchful jealousy, was roused by his visible discomfort.

## CHAPTER V

**A**ND Carleton himself was surprised by the impact of this story about Clara. He had a vivid imagination, which often played him the trick of involving his sympathies in other people's affairs. But to start the picture-making in his brain, some interest in the other people was required. Well, and did not Clara interest him? He had to confess that she did. He had said to himself, by the time she had finished playing, that afternoon, that she was an exquisite thing to look at. The steady attention which he gave her at that time might be laid to the account of the music, as he was aware, when he seized the opportunity.

She was, then, very charming to look at. And her manner pleased him. It had a softness which seemed at first like shyness, and gave her a foreign air. Her personality completely escaped the general obviousness of her countrywomen—the quality that was writ large on, for example, Mrs. Langham. Clara had no desire to hit one between

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the eyes. She had the grace of women who have been docile to control, who have learned to express their individuality thoroughly within set limits. There was rhyme and rhythm in her. She was poetry, as opposed to the prose of ordinary——

This was the imagination at work! Carleton realized it and pulled himself up with a laugh. But he went on thinking about her. It was after he had parted from Elizabeth. They had talked for an hour longer in the library, mainly about Craven's literary remains—a volume of essays and an unfinished history of the Italian Republics, which was being prepared for the press by his English executor. Then she had gone to write some letters, laughingly confessing, as she bade him good-night, that she kept up her old habit of promiscuous correspondence.

“Not all of my friends drop me—as you did,” was her last word.

Carleton thought he had replied to this before. He went outdoors and walked about the garden, smoking slowly. The sky was overcast now, and rain was in the air. He resolved to go down next day to the *Uffizi*.

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Clara was still in his mind. He went over the story that Elizabeth had told, filling out the bare sketch, picturing the tragedy. . . . Fifteen years ago—she must have been about eight at the time. And afterwards—between that time and this—what had her life been? “Living about” with a mother who was “socially ruined” and disowned by her family. And how had she got her education, her manners, her way of meeting the world? She seemed like a girl who had been sheltered——

And yet, did she, after all? No, she had none of the light-heartedness that should have been hers. Her sadness was real, and there was a deeper reason for it than the hindering of her musical ambition. If she was stopped there, and if she felt that she could not marry, and must go on living with her selfish beast of a mother, there could not be much in life, truly, for her. And she was full of life, full of possibilities.

But was there any reason why she should not marry? That question seemed not to have been answered definitely. But someone must be able to answer it. Someone must know what her

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chances were, supposing that the father's insanity were proved! Her chances! Carleton shivered as he thought what those chances might be. He thought of a man whom he had known at college, and later—a brilliant mind wrecked by periodic frenzy. Poor Colby was the victim of misplaced optimism on the part of his parents. There was the taint of insanity on both sides of his house. His sister had killed herself out of fear of the family curse.

These things were rather too awful to think about. And to think of them in connection with that charming girl! He knew that her father might be as mad as a hatter, however, without necessarily involving her. That outbreak of homicidal frenzy, that tragedy at Mentone, might have no consequences for her. . . . No, that was not quite right. Consequences there must be. She had been living in the shadow of them ever since. And if there were also the blacker shadow of fear——

Carleton threw away his cigar half-smoked and started for the house, intending to read something cheerful for an hour or so. As he mounted the

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steps he heard the carriage; and he overtook Mrs. Langham and Clara, returned from their dinner, in the hall. Mrs. Langham, wrapped in a cloak of brocade, was ascending the stairs. Clara had stopped to take off her wrap, which was slipping off her shoulders. She had dropped a long, filmy scarf. Carleton picked it up, and took her cloak, which she trailed on the floor.

“ I drop everything,” she said with a light sigh. “ Oh, how tired I am ! ”

“ You are always tired, Clara,” said her mother, sweeping majestically ahead.

Clara went up slowly, her hand on the stair-rail, her head bent. Carleton now saw her in formal evening-dress. Her beautiful young shoulders were bare, and her arms. She had a string of small pearls round her throat, and a jewelled butterfly in her hair. Carleton adored women in white; Clara apparently never wore anything else. Her cloak was white also, her scarf, her long gloves. She had one glove on, and held the other in her hand; and presently she dropped that, too, unheeding, and Carleton picked it up.

Mrs. Langham stopped opposite the library door.

“It’s much too early to go to bed—and besides, I am hungry,” she announced. “Do come in, Mr. Carleton. Is Elizabeth about?”

Carleton opened the door for her, and waited for Clara. She hesitated a moment, then said: “I think I’m too tired.”

“Yes, child; go to bed,” called her mother.

Clara took her wraps from Carleton, and gave him a glance that said various things. It was lightly melancholy, questioning, appealing. It struck him that she guessed she had been talked over—and also that she was decidedly not without coquetry. He followed Mrs. Langham into the library, and at her request rang the bell.

“I am simply starving,” she said pathetically. “We have been to dine with some Italian friends of Clara’s—and they don’t dine, according to *our* ideas. That’s what Morelli says: ‘You go to see beautiful old plate, beautiful dishes, nice people, but not to dine—oh, no!’ And I drank tea afterward, and now I shall not sleep.”

Roberto appeared, and she asked him in a

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fatigued tone for something to eat. He listened, bowed, and disappeared, in a manner which conveyed a sense of imposition. It was not usual at La Fontanella to ask for meals at eleven o'clock at night.

"Do you think you could light the fire?" enquired the lady of Carleton. "He won't come back for half an hour."

Carleton, amused at being found available after all, put a match to the logs laid ready in the great stone fireplace.

"Mrs. Craven has gone to write letters," he observed.

"Ah, well, I shan't disturb her," said Mrs. Langham. "Perhaps you will share my supper?"

"No supper, thanks; but I shall be glad to stay."

"Very well, provided you will smoke, or something. I couldn't stand your just sitting and looking at me; it would destroy my appetite. Get Roberto to bring you some whiskey and water."

"I shall obey."

Carleton rearranged the logs, and the flame shot up about them. Mrs. Langham had been stand-

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ing on the stone step under the chimney-piece. Now she moved down, and in a moment more threw off her purple mantle, which she had held about her. She wore a dress of black velvet, embroidered at irregular intervals with gold figures; her black hair was braided into a crown above her low forehead.

She sat down in a high-backed brocaded chair, and the train of her dress tumbled about her feet in deep folds.

“Really, who would think it could be so cold in May?” she said, looking at the fire, and presenting her profile to him.

Carleton looked at her, and felt himself rather an inadequate audience. It was like a glittering show being given to empty benches. He felt apologetic.

“And how did you and Bessie get on?” she demanded suddenly.

“Quite peaceably, thank you.”

Carleton gave a little more attention to the fire, and then sat down on the step and lit a cigar.

“I call her Bessie because, somehow, it suits her. She’s girlish—don’t you know? But I think

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you must have quarrelled, else why were you moping about the garden alone? That's the worst of seeing old friends again. One oughtn't to try it, really."

"Perhaps there ought to be a time-limit," suggested Carleton. "Say ten years. Not to know anybody longer than ten years."

"Good heavens, why ten? I should say five—or three. As a matter of fact, one year would be enough for most people, including relatives. Relatives, of course, include husbands and wives. . . . But, you know, people do get shockingly out of date. And there is nothing more disheartening than to meet persons you've known well at one time—and hear them say exactly the same things, and all that. People don't get any new ideas after a certain age. And even gossip, you know, scandal, and so on—there's nothing new about that, either. People all do the same things."

She was looking down at Carleton now, her eyes a shining line of black between thick lashes.

"It is a dull world," he said cheerfully.

"Well, it is. The amount of *ennui* it contains

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is something frightful. It is a beast of a world. If you are not bored, it is only because you're something worse. . . . Did you know my cousin James?"

"Craven, you mean? Oh, yes, a little."

"I remember him a long-winded old gentleman when I was at home. He was my mother's second cousin, or something. He must have been a hundred when he died."

"He was about eighty, I think."

"Well, that is old enough! Fancy having a husband of eighty! Poor, dear Elizabeth was an angel to him, I don't doubt. She really is a good creature. Clara is fond of her—else I suppose we shouldn't be here. . . . Ah, yes, there is another reason, too, for I am terribly poor this year, and hotels are so expensive. My lawyers in America write me the most discouraging letters. They are stupid, old-fashioned people. I should like to get a new one. Do you know any very good one? The trouble is, my property is mostly in the South—East Virginia, or is it West? Sometimes I think I ought to go back to see about it; but, then, I know nothing of business. You are in

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the Government, aren't you, or in politics of some sort?"

Carleton laughed. "I am—or was—an humble newspaper man. Now I'm nothing at all."

"But Elizabeth said—— She didn't say much about you, to be sure, so we were the more curious. But I'm sure she said you were in politics."

"Well, the newspapers have more or less interest in that sort of thing. Oh, I suppose I helped elect a Mayor—perhaps a Governor. But what does that amount to? There's no glory in it."

"You Americans are so modest! One has to find out about you from somebody else. Now, even an Englishman will tell you what he has done—and a Frenchman or Italian will tell you much more. How do you like Morelli?"

"Very much—at first sight. I should think he must be an able fellow."

"He is. But there is so little chance for a live man here in this dead old country. He can't possibly make any money. I've been urging him to go somewhere else. Do you think he'd get on in America?"

## *The Eternal Spring*

“Professionally, you mean? I should think he would. He’s clever with people, I see.”

“Yes, but he hates the practising part of it. It’s the theory he likes—that’s what he’s always saying. He wants to have a laboratory and write books, and get laws passed to benefit the working-people, and all that. What he ought to do is to marry a rich woman. But instead he wishes to marry Clara.”

At this point Roberto entered with a large tray. He moved a table to Mrs. Langham’s side, and set the tray on it—with more noise and less grace than he usually thought proper.

“Ah, salad, too—really, that’s quite nice! *Grazia tanto, Roberto, e porta whiskey per il Signore, prego.*”

Roberto gave Carleton a special bow, and fetched the whiskey with alacrity.

Mrs. Langham poured herself a glass of claret, and began to eat, with the stalwart appetite Carleton had previously remarked in her. Suddenly she looked almost content. The glow of the fire had a good deal to do with it; she showed a cat-like enjoyment of the heat.

## *The Eternal Spring*

“Yes,” she went on presently, “and Elizabeth has tried to make the match. It’s a mistake, for Clara, too, ought to marry a rich man. Her little money is only enough to dress her and pay for her music. But”—she shrugged her generous shoulders, polished, white, frankly exhibited—“when people make up their minds to do a foolish thing—” A mouthful of chicken stopped the rest.

“Do you think she will marry him?” Carleton found himself asking, to his great astonishment.

“I think so. When a man makes up his mind to marry a woman he can always do it—if there is no other man. . . . Such is your strength—brutal creatures that you are!—or our weakness.”

Another glass of claret; and two velvet-black eyes looking down at Carleton over the rim.

“Then we are responsible, whatever happens—whether we marry you or not?”

“Eh? Exactly, you are responsible. The stronger person is always to blame if he does not control the weaker. And if he *does*, and makes mistakes, he is still to blame. But the last is better than the first. It is better for a woman to be married to a strong man, no matter what comes of it.

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We are all slaves at heart! But you American men do not understand that! American women want equality—and by that they mean the right to treat their husbands as the Ruspoli tries to treat hers. It is a pity that wife-beating has gone out of fashion. There would be fewer nerves if it was the custom now. But people are all made of straw and paper nowadays. . . . ‘Nowadays!’ I talk like a grandmother, don’t I? And you never talk at all, do you?”

“Sometimes I like to listen.”

“I can’t see why you should want to listen to me. Elizabeth says I do nothing but scold—‘rail,’ as she puts it,—abuse everybody and everything. Well, so I do. I read a story by Tolstoi the other day—I like Russian stories, when they’re not about peasants or politics. This was called ‘Two Generations.’ There was a father, a Russian of the old school, a real eighteenth century person—a tremendous gambler and drinker, making love to all the women, full of life and gaiety—really a delicious creature! Then his son, twenty years later, a correct, respectable young man—he visits a woman who had had a love-affair with the father,

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had been loved and left, all in a rush, and was still in love with his memory! . . . Well, the son wins the old lady's money at cards, in a correct, respectable manner, and goes away. . . . That's all of the story; isn't it pretty? I wish I had been born a Russian. It's a fascinating country. Have you ever been there? I love everything Russian—people, books, music. I can never get Clara to play Russian music—though, to be sure, it's generally Polish. She bores people to death with her everlasting Bach."

"I didn't see you this afternoon."

"No—all those old cats of Elizabeth's—catch me! And then, as I say, Bach bores me. Clara plays well, though; don't you think so? I can't think where she gets her ability to work. I could never work in my life. Do you believe in work, like all good Americans?"

"I don't think I believe in anything."

"Oh, you are a man without convictions—the modern sort? What a pity! I wish we could go back a hundred years and get some. That's the reason I like Russians—they believe in all sorts of things. And Catholics. There's a nice English-

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man here who is determined to convert me. He is endlessly amusing. I think I shall end by being converted. It is such a civilised religion—plenty of emotion in it, and all the reason you want—I should not want any. What new religion have you now in America? I think I will smoke—have you a cigarette?”

She rose, having finished her supper, and walked down the length of the room, while Carleton was searching for Elizabeth's cigarettes. He found them, finally, and took them to Mrs. Langham, who was standing before the star picture of Craven's collection—a fourteenth-century altar-piece, a Madonna in pearl and gold, delicate and exquisite as a perfect flower.

“It's beautiful, isn't it? Why don't people paint like that nowadays, instead of daubing their paint on and expecting you to guess what they mean? The *Uffizi* is to have it at Elizabeth's death. To think of the fine things Cousin James got together here! And now they are Elizabeth's. I wish I had them. I wonder what she will do?”

“I don't know,” said Carleton, looking at a bracelet, set with rubies, on Mrs. Langham's wrist.

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It was a round, very feminine wrist; her hands were small, rather plump, and wonderfully fine in texture; her feet were small, with excessive insteps and heels, and she walked and held herself "very tall."

She laughed. "Well, if you don't know now, I daresay you will soon. . . . This has been very nice. We must have another talk soon. And then you must do some of the talking. Will you? Good-night."

She gave him her hand, with a smile so gracious and pleasing that he found himself bowing over her fingers, not ungracefully. It was something like rendering homage to royalty—a formal salute, not a kiss. This he told himself as he departed to bed—conscious that he had enjoyed the frivolous end of the evening, and quite in the mood of charity toward the very handsome mother of Clara.

## CHAPTER VI

**B**UT this was a mood of brief duration; it did not, in fact, survive the night. What did survive, and woke with him on a morning of pouring rain, was the recollection of Clara's look, as they stood in the corridor. Not only her expressive glance at him, but her whole appearance, was extraordinarily vivid; her grace, her fragility. She was like a flower-piece set for some festal occasion, and drooping in too close an air. She should not have gone out, after playing in the afternoon. "You are always tired, Clara." Poor little girl!

No wonder she was tired, with that mother, with that tragedy in her past, with her work and her too sensitive nerves—no wonder she was sad! It was quite enough, without thinking of the darker shadow. Carleton did not want to think of that, and the result was that he thought of nothing else, until he had made up his mind to

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Poor Elizabeth! She had lived beyond the time for the ordinary experience of a woman without being touched by it. And now, Carleton could not but feel, she looked to him to give it to her. And it must be given in its perfection, too—her long waiting demanded that! A romantic love—the love of youth—was what she wanted. She was too unsophisticated to see the use of what she might in reason expect.

Expectation! That was her attitude toward him, try as she would to hide it. . . . What had become of the idle peace and sweetness of his first hours at La Fontanella?

He found Elizabeth in the library, busy with a voluminous mail, and looking tired and depressed. She dropped her letters when he appeared, and turned to the fire, assuring him that he wasn't in the way.

“Are you going out in spite of the weather?” she asked. “You can have the closed carriage if you like—but the galleries will be as cold as a tomb. I'm going to lunch to-day at Mrs. Blandon's—you know, the little Englishwoman you

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talk to Elizabeth about it. Perhaps they together could do something to help Clara. If they were married, she might come and live with them. She was undoubtedly morbid and imagined a lot of things. He wished that he might talk with her frankly about her life and herself. Perhaps he might. There was no harm, at any rate, in showing his interest. Meantime, there was Elizabeth.

He was beginning to feel uncomfortable about Elizabeth. It was all very well to think of taking her on a basis of friendship. But, as a matter of fact, he had come over with an almost definite idea of marrying her. She knew that; other people suspected it. Indeed, all that stood in the way was, he became convinced, what Elizabeth called his honesty. He had not made love to her warmly enough. Well, he was not warmly in love with her. But he was very fond of her, and perhaps in time she would be content with that. However, it was an embarrassing position. If Elizabeth had been tremendously in love with *him*, even, it might be easier. But he thought that she was more in love with her idea of love than anything else. And that being so, who could content her?

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liked yesterday. She asked me to bring you. She says you have the most sympathetic eyes she ever saw. Look out for her—she's a desperate flirt. . . . I hear you and Augusta had a midnight supper last night. Aren't you getting rather gay? How do you like her now?"

"She's a gorgeous creature. But, after all, looks aren't everything. I don't think I should want her around much of the time. Clara, now, would be much more companionable. Tell me a little more about her, will you? I mean about this idea of hers that she is—that she ought not to marry and all that. . . ."

Carleton had begun in a light tone, but it broke down as he touched the theme of his thoughts. He became grave and frowned at the fire. Elizabeth shivered a little, in spite of the warmth of the room. She closed and opened her eyes wearily. Her eyelids were pink, and it struck Carleton uncomfortably that she had been crying.

"I don't know very much about it," she said. "Clara hasn't talked much to me; but I've put several things she has said together, and indirectly—well, her mother talks more about it. Augusta

## *The Eternal Spring*

feels deeply aggrieved at Clara's attitude. It reminds her constantly of——”

“Good heavens! But never mind *her!* You practically said last night that he was probably not insane at all—Langham, I mean. Now, if he wasn't, all this idea of Clara's——”

“Yes, but nobody *knows*. At least, Augusta probably knows more than anyone else, and she insists that he had shown unmistakable signs of insanity before, and that she lived in terror of her life; in fact, that Malaspina was trying to defend her when he was killed.”

“But someone must know definitely—people who knew them at that time——”

“It may be. But I don't know. You see, all this happened many years before I knew anything of them; and what people say about it now is vague.”

“But there must be records somewhere—evidence taken at the time, that would show something. . . .”

“There may be; but no one has investigated, so far as I know.”

“But someone ought to investigate—when

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perhaps the course of her whole life depends on it! Hasn't she any other relatives?"

"I think Clara would recoil from the idea of having it all brought up again."

"Perhaps she would, if she implicitly believes in her mother. But does she?"

"I don't know. If she doesn't, she pretends to."

"Yes, but this marriage—— Mrs. Langham practically said last night that Clara was to marry Morelli——"

"Oh, I know; but she ignores Clara's feelings as far as possible. No one knows what Clara will do. I know Morelli has asked her to marry him, and, as you can see, he is with her a good deal. He would promise anything to marry her, under any circumstances, I believe. I don't know whether she hesitates because she thinks it wrong to marry or because she doesn't care enough for him. What Augusta would like would be to have her marry a rich man. But it makes her furious when Clara says she won't marry at all."

"Then her mother tells her that she has this

## *The Eternal Spring*

possible inheritance of insanity, and at the same time expects her to ignore it—is that it?”

“Augusta isn’t very logical when her own wishes are involved.”

“‘Logical’ is a mild word for it. . . . But, look here, all this vagueness ought to be cleared away. Someone should find out whether there was anything wrong back of Langham, in his family; also, whether anyone but his wife ever thought him insane. She doesn’t strike me as a person who would risk her life, if she *did* think him so. . . . Also, what the police records show about the circumstances of the tragedy. . . . You say it was at Mentone, fifteen years ago. Do you know the month?”

“No,” said Elizabeth in surprise. “Do *you* think of investigating?”

“Don’t you think we might do it together? Clara needn’t know anything about it—at least, not now. But you are a relative, and if you could go to her and show conclusively that her mother had lied——”

Elizabeth seemed deep in thought. She was

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silent for some moments. Finally, she said: "I doubt if anyone could show conclusively, even if she has. The line between sanity and insanity isn't always very clear, in the case of that kind of temperament. Clara herself——"

"Well?"

"I may tell you, Barry. Indeed, it's no secret—at least, Augusta told me quite frankly——"

"Tell me, then."

"Well, there have been times when Clara herself wasn't—quite herself."

"What times? How?"

"Twice she has had to spend some months away from everyone, in a kind of sanitarium. Nervous strain resulting in intense melancholia was the medical explanation—which explains about as much as they generally do. She had been overworking, I suppose. But for weeks she wouldn't speak to anyone. She showed a deep dislike to her mother. She would sit for whole days with her eyes closed——"

Carleton got up, and began to walk about the room.

"I don't see that there's anything abnormal in

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any of those things. That she should be melancholy and dislike her mother——”

“That’s what I say, Barry. The line isn’t easy to draw. . . . But what is certain is that she’s of an excessively nervous temperament—abnormally high-keyed. I suppose it’s partly for that reason that I haven’t meddled. I’ve never dared to question her—I haven’t even questioned Augusta. . . . Then, I have had a feeling—which, apparently, in a way, you have, too—that Clara’s romantic disposition may be playing a big part in all this. I don’t know, but I think she sees herself as a kind of victim of Fate. At any rate, she understands the dramatic value of the position! . . . If you could see how she torments Morelli! I don’t mean to be unkind,—I love Clara, and think her a most fascinating creature,—but she is sometimes quite diabolical. I can always tell when she’s going to vow herself to hopeless spinsterhood, for then she makes herself ten times as pretty as usual! . . . I can’t take it quite as seriously as you do, Barry, for I know her better—and I hope all this will have a natural end in her marriage.”

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“And *you* think there’s nothing in the insanity story?”

“Ah, I don’t know what to think. I think she’s young, and ought to be happy.”

Carleton came back to her.

“You’re a clever woman, Elizabeth, and sweet, too,” he said, with abrupt conviction. “You’re sweeter than you used to be—and gentler. . . . Elizabeth, dear, will you marry me?”

She rose quickly, with a cry of exasperation. “What a man!” Her hands instinctively went up to hide her reddened eyes. “No!” she said emphatically. “And now I must finish my letters. Are you going to Mrs. Bandon’s with me, or are you going to town?”

“I am going with you. And on the way you will give me your reason for that very short and unpleasant answer.”

“My reason is such a good one that I shall never tell it to you. No, on second thought, I’ll tell it to you now. If ever you want a woman to marry you, don’t say so in the morning, when she is looking her worst—and in the middle of a prosaic talk about other people.”

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“It seems to me that’s a very good time to say it.”

“Well, that proves that you know nothing at all about women.”

She sat down at her desk and began opening her remaining letters hastily.

“Good-by, then,” said Carleton, moving toward the door. “At what time shall we resume the subject?”

“The carriage will be at the door at one o’clock.”

At one o’clock, accordingly, they set off. Elizabeth looked ten years younger, in a light dress and a small hat covered with flowers and tied on with a spotted veil. She was talkative and excited, as always when anything that interested her was going on. The carriage held two snugly. It jolted down the long hill, over roughnesses made or left bare by the storm. The rain poured in sheets down the windows. Elizabeth had a foreign way of using some perfume—lilac, or at least something light and springlike.

Carleton felt himself by this time quite at the

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mercy of circumstance. He had begun by intending one thing, had changed his intention several times, and now could not feel that he had any worth mentioning. He left himself to chance. He was aware, however, that his head ached, and that he wished he were not going out to lunch and talk.

"I wish we could ride on together, forever ride," he said.

"You mean drive? It doesn't sound so poetic, but think of riding in this rain! What's the trouble—don't you want to go? You look tired. Are you boring yourself too much with people? You know I don't want that—I told you that you must do exactly what you pleased and no more. I can send you straight back in the carriage, if you like, and they need never know you thought of coming. I shall have a cab home, anyway. You can get some kind of a meal at the house. . . . Clara will be there, probably."

He was conscious that Elizabeth's side-glance at him was a good deal sharper than her voice.

"I'll let you know when we get there, if I may," he said. "At any rate, I shall have had the drive with you."

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“Ah, the drive with me! . . . If you desert me I shall bring another man home with me when I come. He is to lunch at the Blandons’, and I thought of bringing him back to dine. He’s an American professor, just over. I like them fresh out of the academic atmosphere. I met him the other day, and he is rather nice.”

“That settles it—I shall certainly go back. I wouldn’t for anything deprive you of the professor. But you ought at least to be a little kind to me now.”

“Kind? Am I not doing my utmost to be kind to you?”

“But your utmost, apparently, is to leave me to myself. I don’t want to be let alone all the time. That’s not exactly what I came over for, Elizabeth.”

“Never mind what you came over for, Barry dear. We’ve discussed that before, and you tried to explain. So let us take it for granted that I know what you came for.”

“Then, if you do, you may as well tell me, mayn’t you?”

“Tell you what you came for?”

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“Tell me if I may have what I came for.”

She was silent, turning her face to the blank window.

“You came for—many things, Barry. Some I could give you, perhaps. But I’m afraid to try, for I fear I should fail. Because——”

He waited.

“I couldn’t risk failure!” she cried, facing him and drawing away as far as possible into the corner of the seat. “And I can’t feel that you need me. What you *do* need, I don’t know—you don’t seem to know yourself.”

“Peace and quiet,” he murmured.

“I’m not at all sure that you would find me a quiet or peaceful person.”

“You seem so.”

“Perhaps it’s the quiet of despair—or resignation—or death! I don’t feel peaceful, I assure you! No, if it’s peace you want——”

“It’s life—new life—I want.”

“Ah, well—that’s—different——”

She looked at him, her eyes shining, her cheeks flushing behind the veil.

That was the moment. And just there the im-

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pulse that had carried him on ebbed and failed. An overwhelming physical weariness came upon him. His eyes had lost their vividness, his face looked haggard.

“Why do you make me think about myself?” he demanded. “I can’t help seeing what a miserable beast I am—a perfectly useless animal. I’m thirty years old, and what shall I ever be good for now? What have I ever been good for, if you come to that? I used to get pleasure out of life, and that was reason enough for me for living; but now I feel like an empty sponge—wrung dry! How can I have the face to ask for anything when I’ve nothing to give in exchange?”

He dropped his head with a long sigh. And Elizabeth closed her eyes, not to see his limp figure—and perhaps for another reason.

The wheels grated on a stone pavement, and in a moment the carriage stopped.

“Don’t try to get out,” Elizabeth said hastily, gathering up her skirts and opening the door on her side. She slipped out, and the door slammed after her before Carleton could speak. He caught a blurred glimpse of her as she dived into a door

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opening casually in the wall. Then the carriage started again.

Carleton wished that he had got out, had made an effort over himself and met these people. He began to realise that he must make some effort, unless he wanted to be reduced to the condition of a jelly-fish. It might be agreeable to be a jelly-fish; but it would undoubtedly be hard to stop being one. He felt that already he had got rather far on the way to total spinelessness.

There seemed not much of his original being left, except aches. A brutal ache at the base of the brain was the chief sensation of life at present.

Wouldn't it be a good thing, now, to clear out? Elizabeth couldn't really want him around, he thought. He must be an unmitigated nuisance. It wasn't decent of him to stay on in this state.

But perhaps it wouldn't be decent to clear out, either. He had committed himself to Elizabeth, as far as he could. He had offered himself to her—several times—was it two or three times? Perhaps if he kept on doing it he might attain, in time, to the proper amount of intensity. Then she would be pleased, possibly, to give an answer. At present

## *The Eternal Spring*

he was hung up, like Mahomet's coffin, between earth and heaven. A faint smile touched his lips as this figure suggested itself. If Elizabeth let him fall back to earth, what should he do? Burrow into it somewhere, if possible, like the Worm of the fable. "*Lass' mich schlafen!*" he growled, in Fafner's phrase, and fancied he could feel the cool, dark mould settling over him as he turned himself for another nap. . . . And heaven? Well, La Fontanella could hardly be heaven, after all.

## CHAPTER VII

**A**FTER the rain came a week of delicious weather, warm and lazy, with a cool wind at nightfall. June began, but summer still held off her hand, and the spirit of spring lingered in freshness and cool colour. But it was the southern spring and the Italian country. It was a reviving of old desires, a wakening of infinite reminiscences. It was rich and deep. It was sweet, with the eternal, pathetic sweetness of passing youth seen by middle age.

At La Fontanella the time went by swiftly and easily. People came and went, and were pleasant or tiresome as the case might be. There was always someone at luncheon, generally two or three at dinner. Carleton drove about the country and revisited his old loves in church or gallery. Elizabeth wrote letters, made and received visits. Clara worked at her music and began to show some interest in Carleton. Mrs. Langham bewailed her entanglement in an endless legal correspondence,

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when all she wanted was a simple matter of a little more money.

In the course of the week the professor became domiciled at the villa. His name was Matthew Harris, and he came from a New England girls' college. He was a bachelor of forty-eight; tall, spare, carefully dressed, with a pointed beard and elegant eye-glasses. He knew nearly everything that can be learned from books, and had written several books about books. When he had been a few days about, everybody liked him. He was so happy that he became lovable. He proved to be romantic and to have a congealed fountain of joy in life within him, that now, in a mild atmosphere, began to thaw out. He paid lyric compliments to Mrs. Langham, and admired Clara; but his main devotion was to Elizabeth.

"She's fascinatingly complex," he said to Carleton. "Her mind is at once frank and elusive. Like a skein of silk—there's just one right place to begin. Make a mistake, and you get a hopeless tangle. But the tangles are fascinating, too."

Elizabeth seemed to like being untangled. She gave a great deal of time to Mr. Harris.

## *The Eternal Spring*

“Isn’t he delicious!” she demanded of Carleton. “He knows all about books, and nothing else. He’s like Miranda on the desert island—ready to fall down and worship.”

“He is rather girlish,” said Carleton.

“Ah, you’re envious of him! He does enjoy himself.”

But Carleton was enjoying, too—not himself, exactly, but other people and things. Some of Clara’s Italians interested him—in themselves, and also because anything connected with Clara now somehow interested him. They were young people, very modern, fluent in English, and in everything else, apparently. The two that Clara seemed most intimate with were cousins—both intense and melancholy creatures. The girl, unmarried at the age of twenty-six, chafed against the conventional bounds of her life, and talked passionate anarchy. The man, with a brilliant university record in philosophy and a poetic temperament, was unhappy because his family expected a worldly career for him. Clara was eloquent to Carleton about this young fellow’s predicament, and she was very charming to him, and, in different ways, to others

## *The Eternal Spring*

who came. Carleton saw that she had a number of devotees. He perceived, too, before many days, that under the gay mask of Morelli's customary manner something like to desperation was concealed.

At the beginning Morelli talked to him pleasantly and frankly—talked about Clara, even, in an impersonal way. Carleton learned that they had met first in London, where Morelli was doing some laboratory work, about eight months before; and that Morelli was much interested in her musical talent—in fact, was rather over-enthusiastic about it. In these talks Carleton was judging him, with the deeper interest because of Clara. He saw in Morelli a man destined to practical success, gifted and level-headed, but with an emotional streak capable of knocking him off his feet temporarily, as it had done in the case of Clara.

As Carleton saw more of Clara, he found Morelli less accessible, and began to see in his manner traces of the moody irritability natural to a lover on probation. Clara, too, showed more and more some sort of strain. She worked long hours at her music, and would come in to luncheon

## *The Eternal Spring*

looking white and exhausted; then she would be silent and abstracted, and her face expressed a more intense melancholy than Carleton had ever before seen on a human countenance. He thought, also, that she avoided being alone with Morelli. And he saw the kind of thing in her that Elizabeth called "diabolical"—a changeableness, physical as well as mental, a way of flushing suddenly into beauty quite radiant, when she chose.

Some of these beautiful moments had been for him; in particular, once when she played for him alone in the music-room. They had had a long talk about art in general, and music in particular. Then she played—some emotional music of Beethoven, and that Chopin nocturne that has the movement of the sea in it, the incessant muffled rise and fall of the blind waves. She had been much interested in Carleton's ideas, and had talked fast and freely herself; expression had excited her. Her cheeks and lips were vivid with colour, her eyes alight. And as, after the final note of the nocturne, she looked up at Carleton, she was so beautiful that he simply gazed at her in a maze of pleasure, not even conscious that he was silent.

## *The Eternal Spring*

He found that her eyes were of a green colour, like sea-water, with the same opaqueness a little way below the surface; they were soft as velvet. Her brows and lashes were black, like her hair; she was snow-white and rose-red, like the maiden in the fairy-tale. At least, this is what Carleton would have said, if he had said anything at that moment. As it was, he sat with his arms folded, and looked at her. And Clara touched a note or two idly, and ran a delicate rill-like scale up in the treble, and then suddenly closed the piano.

“It must be tea-time,” she said, and glanced over Carleton’s head.

Morelli was standing in the doorway.

“Ah, how long have you been there?” demanded Clara imperiously. “I don’t like people to look at me unawares.”

Carleton got up, feeling that the spell had been painfully broken, and astonished at her roughness. Morelli was smiling.

“Forgive me,” he said with smooth grace. “I came by Mrs. Craven’s request to say that tea is ready.”

## *The Eternal Spring*

“Don’t let Mrs. Craven make a servant of you,” said Clara, and walked out past him haughtily.

Morelli, very pale, followed without looking at Carleton, who felt extremely uncomfortable. But the scene was not over yet. Having been a witness to Clara’s temper, he had to see her repentance also. Before she had reached the gate of the courtyard, she stopped, turned to Morelli, who was nearest her, and put out her hand.

“Forgive me, Gennaro, I was horribly rude,” she said, with the grieved and shamed look of a child. “But I have been so bothered to-day, my nerves are fairly on edge.”

Morelli touched the offered hand with his lips; and Clara sighed and walked swiftly out on the terrace. It had not taken a minute; but Carleton, following a few steps behind with Morelli, who did not speak to him, felt oddly that it had changed their relations. As to Clara, he did not know exactly what he felt for her, or she for him. On the face of it, she was angry with Morelli for having interrupted their talk; but very probably, having made peace with the offender, she would

## *The Eternal Spring*

now visit that anger on him, Carleton, as the ultimate cause.

There were several visitors at the tea-table under the cypresses, and Clara was surrounded by them. When Carleton had a chance to observe her, he saw that all the colour had died out of her face. She looked now as indifferent as was consistent with listening at all to the woes of a vivacious lady, who had rented the villa of an American countess, and had found that she could not pluck a flower in the grounds without accounting to the Countess's steward, nor pass her own gates after ten o'clock at night. . . .

Mrs. Langham returned in the carriage, accompanied by her poodle Fidelio, as the visitors were about to go. As she stepped out and came across the terrace, trailing her embroidered violet dress and posing her head against the lace parasol that slanted over her shoulder, Carleton thought of a flaunting peacock and of Maupassant's world of gold, purple and marble. That ought to be Augusta's world; no mists, no mysteries, but everything hard, clear and splendid. But, unfortunately, there were mists in her skies; there was

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decidedly a cloud on her brow, and her voice had the harsh complaint of the peacock under its artificial softness. She sat down in the chair that Elizabeth had left to accompany her guests to their waiting carriage; and though she was thus nearest to the tea-equipage, it devolved upon Carleton, as she never did anything for herself, to give her a cup of tea.

“It’s quite undrinkable,” she said languidly, setting down the cup after one taste. “Of course, it’s been standing an hour or so. Will you please ask Roberto to get some made fresh for me?”

“Let me go,” said Morelli quickly.

Clara was standing with Elizabeth in the doorway. Morelli joined them, and the three went in together.

Carleton was for some moments inattentive to the lady left to him. But she, too, was silent, and devoted herself to punching holes in the gravel with the thin ferule of her parasol; Fidelio sitting by on his haunches, his red mouth half open, and observing the world cynically. Carleton noted the sprays of purple flowers embroidered on the lace

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of the parasol; its handle was silver, set with amethysts. She wore a plumed hat, and long grey gloves wrinkling up to meet the frills of her sleeves. The labour of how many fingers was represented by this scheme of decoration, concentrated on this one among many settings for her coldly voluptuous charm! She was undoubtedly a costly creature!

“I’ve been thinking that you ought to have a different frame,” he said suddenly. “Something like this, but bigger, more formal. There ought to be long flights of marble steps, and marble balustrades with peacocks on them, and swans somewhere below on the water. And you should wander about always in the gardens, where it would be always afternoon——”

“That’s very poetic,” said the lady, punching more holes. “But it’s impossible, like all poetry. This is a world of prose, my dear creature. And to prove it, I am about to ask you some most prosaic questions. Do you think, for instance, you could help me to make some money?”

“But, dear Mrs. Langham, I don’t know how to make money.”

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“ Oh, yes, you do! Elizabeth has been telling me. I know you have made a good deal.”

Carleton inwardly confounded Elizabeth's busy tongue; but he spoke slowly to control his irritation.

“ I did make some—not very much—at one time, but——”

“ Well, could you not tell me how you did it? I don't know anything about the American markets——”

“ But, neither do I—now. Stock conditions change, as you are probably aware. For three months I haven't looked at a market report, and I hope never to see one again. So that any information I had at the time I was speculating would be perfectly useless now.”

Mrs. Langham raised her eyes—in softness they were like Clara's—and looked at him carefully, quite unconvinced.

“ But if you knew how then, you must know how now. And why did you stop?” she enquired curiously.

“ Because I had enough.”

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“Enough? But, then, you must have made a great deal!” And her eyes opened wide.

“Enough for myself—that isn’t very much.”

“Oh!” Her gaze became reflective; then, as her own wish recurred, despondent. “It seems to be incredibly difficult to do anything about money. I have had another perfectly stupid letter from my lawyers. . . . I thought perhaps, as Elizabeth’s friend, you might——”

“I would, of course, do anything I could. But—well, if, for instance, I wanted very much to make some money for myself just now, I should have to go back to America, watch things carefully for some time before going in, and then stay on the spot and watch them ten times as hard. Do you see? And, of course, I couldn’t advise anybody else to take risks that I wouldn’t take for myself.”

“I see,” she said reluctantly. “What a frightful nuisance it all is!”

The tea came, and Carleton carefully poured out a fresh cup and put in the sugar and lemon as she had previously directed. She took it with an expression of resignation.

“I suppose I must go to some fearful little hole

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this summer and economise," she said pathetically. "Fortunately, Clara can manage much better than I can—and she doesn't mind those places. Of course, she has her music; otherwise I'm sure she couldn't bear them. And she looks forward to being very successful some day; and that's a great thing for her. I wish I had something to look forward to. What do you think of her chances as a professional?"

"I can't judge," said Carleton curtly. "There are so many considerations——"

"Oh, I know; but I asked you what you thought."

"I should think that, as far as talent goes, and temperament, she had a good chance. She has evidently worked hard, and she has the equipment that no work can give. The question would be of her strength, it seems to me."

"Yes, so they all say," commented Mrs. Langham absently. "It's a pity she couldn't have had my constitution. She will be very unhappy if she doesn't succeed. But, then, who is not unhappy in this world? Are you happy, Signor Philosopher?"

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“ I am quite as happy as I deserve to be.”

“ Oh, deserve! What has that to do with it? Does your Providence keep a shop, and hand out so much happiness over the counter in return for so much goodness? ”

“ No; or if it does, it gives short measure, I’m afraid. There’s much more goodness than happiness in this world. Don’t you think so? ”

“ I don’t know much about either,” said the lady, smiling. “ Perhaps I don’t believe in either. People act as they must, and get what they can, I suppose. That’s what I judge from my own experience. It’s all chance.”

She looked at him with grave fixity, and he waited eagerly for something that would give him a lead; but she went on slowly drinking her tea. He was trying to project himself into her mind, to see her as she probably saw herself. It was not in the least probable that she would ever talk to him about what he wanted to know; but he made up his mind to try. She liked to talk—that was in his favour. The first thing was to seem more interested in her and more sympathetic to her point of view. For the moment he wished that he had not

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been so decided about the money-making proposition. He could not have done what she asked, of course; but he might have given her some advice, and, incidentally, have found out more about her—and Clara.

How would Clara like it? Would she like this prying interest of his, or would she resent it? It seemed odd that this was her mother! And yet there were points of resemblance,—physical, at least,—but not many. Clara's inheritance clearly came mainly from her father; and Carleton could not help being actually glad of that. There were worse things than an unbalanced temperament.

His conversation with Mrs. Langham went no farther at the moment, for Elizabeth returned. But a little later Elizabeth referred to it, and showed that she knew its purport. She told him then that Augusta was really in dire straits for money. She had anticipated her next quarter's allowance, she was in debt,—how much she herself did not exactly know,—and for the next few months they must live on Clara's little income.

“And Clara is restless and unhappy. She won't stay much longer with me. It is a trying situation

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for her. She begged me not to lend her mother any money; but Augusta has not asked for any. Poor girl! And poor Gennaro! I'm afraid she doesn't mean to take him, after all."

They were standing in the hall, just before dinner, and now the others began to appear—Mr. Harris and Morelli, then Clara, and lastly, Mrs. Langham. At table Carleton was beside Clara, and was at once too much absorbed in her to pay any heed to the others.

He saw that she was in an intensely nervous state. She ate almost nothing. She did not touch the wine; but her face flushed, and she talked rapidly and in an excited way—yet in a voice so low as to be almost inaudible to—for example—Morelli, on the opposite side of the table. Carleton took a cool, matter-of-fact tone, and watched her carefully—the twitching of her long fingers, the brightness of her eyes as she looked sidewise at him under drooping lids. His characteristic calmness of aspect seemed to please her. He was sure by this time that she liked to be with him, and that his quiet manner made her more expressive.

He had been saying that he envied her the com-

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bination of mental and physical work in her art. "One kind of strain must offset the other. It's a more symmetrical, all-round kind of thing. A writer hasn't that—he has to hunt up some other kind of bodily exercise. It's a quieting thing, I should think, to be able to use the hand and the brain together—as a painter does also."

"I daresay it ought to be. One gets tired enough. But that doesn't always mean rest," said Clara. "I think one has to be happy in order to rest, don't you?"

Carleton considered for a moment, observing at the same time the pure outline of her face—which, in spite of its pathetic look of experience, had not a line as yet. How young she was!

"I've been reading a learned German's theory of happiness," he said. "He thinks that happiness depends upon the exercise of energy and what he calls the volitional surplus. Now, the volitional surplus——"

"Never mind it!" interrupted Clara. "That's just like a learned German! How could he possibly know anything about happiness?"

"By the justly famous Teutonic method. He

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would first carefully observe the phenomena of happiness in different classes of individuals, and investigate the causes. Then he would tabulate his results and reduce them to a mathematical formula, such as——”

“ Oh, pray don't be Teutonic! But tell me your theory of happiness.”

“ I haven't any. But I could give you some facts, and perhaps from them we could construct a theory. For instance, I am happy at this moment. Now, why am I happy? ”

“ I'm sure I don't know. But I suppose it's because you have nothing to make you unhappy at the moment; and so you're at peace.”

“ You are mistaken. I'm not at peace. Happiness isn't peace. But I'm happy because I can sit here, and look at you, and talk to you.”

“ I can't construct any theory on those facts. There aren't enough. At what other times and in what other circumstances have you been happy? ”

“ I think I've never been happy before.”

“ I'm afraid you're frivolous. You haven't the proper scientific spirit. I shan't pursue the investigation any further.”

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“ But you have a theory of your own. You said——”

“ I didn't say anything about happiness. I said one had to be happy in order to rest. And by that I mean, not to be tormented by people and things. I should like to go far away, away from everybody and every place I've known.”

“ To Africa, for instance? ”

“ Anywhere.”

“ You're quite heartless to say that. But, fortunately, you can't do it.”

“ No, it isn't fortunate for me; or for other people, either. I don't make anyone happy.”

“ You might.”

“ No, I couldn't possibly. And people make me desperately unhappy.”

“ And do you think you would find a better order of people somewhere else? ”

“ I should like not to find any at all.”

“ Oh, a desert island, perhaps? ”

“ Yes, something like that.”

“ With a grand piano on it, and a French dress-maker? ”

“ And a good maid, and a *cordon bleu*.”

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“What frightful selfishness, to want to keep all those good things to yourself! And to keep yourself to yourself—that’s worst of all.”

“Oh, I shall do it yet. I shall run away. Surely I have a right to be happy if I can.”

“Yes, but not alone.”

“But that means not at all. You don’t understand.”

“I understand that you’re in a Byronic mood to-night, and that you have a romantic temperament.”

Clara shivered. “Don’t talk about temperament, I beg you. I haven’t any at all; I have only temper. I have a very bad temper; but only when people exasperate me. Now, you must admit that people ought not to exasperate me.”

“Certainly not. But, also, you ought to be charitable—in a reasonable degree.”

Decided exasperation showed in her glance at him.

“Don’t preach to me, please; I can’t bear it. It’s nothing but platitudes—and I don’t want *you* to be tiresome too.”

“But, of course, I am tiresome. Haven’t you

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just said that you'd like never to see me again?"

"No, I did not say that." And now her eyes dwelt on him with enchanting softness. "You are not connected with the things I want to get away from."

"I'm not connected with anything. I'm merely nobody."

"No, not that, either."

She hesitated; and at this moment, to Carleton's intense disgust, the high voice of Mr. Harris addressed itself to him, and the talk became general.

## CHAPTER VIII

**A**S they rose from the table Clara said eagerly, "Let us have coffee out on the terrace—it's so stifling indoors." And she went quickly out through the hall, Carleton following.

"Perhaps you ought to have a wrap," he suggested.

"No, no; this is all I want."

She had a gauzy white scarf round her shoulders, and as she spoke she threw it over her head so that its folds delicately framed her face. It was an unusually warm night. At nine o'clock the twilight had just ended. The moon had nearly filled its circle; it was rising above the cypresses, and the whole place was clearly lighted. Clara, declining coffee, seated herself on the wall, and looked down into the valley, where the shapes of things, and even the colours, refined and rare, were magically visible. In the grass at the foot of the wall, fireflies were thick; they swam hazily about in the depth of air over the hillside. Far below,

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the lights of the city lay like a paler swarm. A cool breath floated down from the pine-woods of the higher hills, and for a moment blew strongly; and in its current the green, winking fire-craft eddied helplessly about. Clara put out her hands to bathe in the breeze and lifted her face to it, closing her eyes sensuously.

“Oh, how delicious!” she murmured. “How wonderful it is, after the heat—how it revives one! I’ve always loved this night-wind. It feels like water as it ripples over your fingers, doesn’t it? I’ll tell you what it’s like—the water of the green lakes that you see in the sunset, with gold islands in them! . . . It will soon be time to go away.”

“To go away? Why?”

“Florence will be terribly hot. This is the beginning of the hot weather. I can’t bear the heat; it withers me up. . . . Look! it must be *fiesta* to-night—the city is illuminated. Genaro! Do you know what all those lights are for?”

Morelli came, with a coffee-cup in one hand and a cigar in the other.

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“It is Fiesta San Somebody or Other,” he said.

“Not San Giovanni?”

“Oh, no—this is only some small saint! We make more of our patron saint than this.”

“St. John—I suppose he is a good Christian saint, not the pagan kind they have in Germany? You know, there they celebrate St. John’s Eve in midsummer—a real pagan festival. Everyone can do as he likes while the fires of St. John burn!”

“We are pagan enough. Shall we say that this is St. John’s Eve, and celebrate him?”

“Oh, that would be robbing Saint Somebody Else! But, let us go somewhere and walk; shall we?”

“Good! From the top of the hill we can see the illumination better.”

“Come, Mr. Carleton, we’ll go to the top of the hill. Come, everybody, and see the illumination!”

Clara slipped to her feet and flitted through the cypresses. So quick was she that she seemed fairly to be running.

“Come, Mr. Carleton!” she called again over her shoulder. And as Carleton hurried after her

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Morelli fell back. They reached the gate as the others were just coming out of the shadow of the cypresses. Clara opened the postern-door at the side of the big iron gates.

“Come,” she urged. “We can’t wait for them. My mother will take a year to get up the hill. She can’t walk in high heels.”

And out she flew. Carleton had to take long strides to keep up with her. The road was steep and full of small stones. It made a sharp turn just above the villa and then wound between high walls, half in black shadow, half in white light. Clara held up her muslin dress over her white slippers. She took three steps to Carleton’s one, and kept always a step ahead, on the lighted half of the road. The gauze scarf eddied cloudily about her head, and one end of it floated backward and now and then touched Carleton’s shoulder.

“*Chose ailée!*” he thought of her. And at the same time the feeling of her restlessness hurt him. Suddenly she stumbled over a stone, and he caught her arm. “Don’t try to run up-hill—they can’t catch you!” he said in a half-tender, half-laughing tone, as he would have spoken to a child.

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“ Oh, it is rough! ” she sighed plaintively. She stood still for a moment, breathing fast. “ It is steep, and I’ve made you run, too! ”

“ But I like running.”

They went on more slowly, but still several turns of the road in advance of the others.

“ How close it is! ” She glanced from side to side. “ These walls shut off the air. And they crowd in so—all the little fields and old houses. Sometimes it makes me long for the wilderness—something really fresh and new.”

“ Then you should come to America,” said Carleton.

“ Yes, I suppose that is wilderness. But it is all vague to me. You see, I never have been there—at least, since I was a year old. And I have never wanted to go back. After all, I suppose it is not really beautiful—as this certainly is.”

“ The real wilderness is—the mountains, the desert.”

“ Ah, I should like to see them! But I suppose I never shall. . . . And yet, why do I say that? I ought to be able to do some of the things that I want to do. I hate people who are always

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being crushed by circumstances. There's nothing so deadly uninteresting. Do you believe in free-will or in predestination?"

"I don't dare to believe in either—just now."

"Coward! I could believe in anything, on such a night as this. Even in the Land of Heart's Desire, 'where nobody gets old and bitter at heart'——"

The road divided, its main branch leading on and upward to the little town that made a stone cap for the peak of the hill. They took the narrower way, and came out on the crest of a long spur. There was a stretch of road free of trees; then came the black shadow of the pine-woods. On the open road the moonlight poured down, quite spoiling the spectacle they had come to see. In the valley the dome was indeed clearly visible, its outlines marked by tiny beads of light; and there were lines of lamps along the buildings near it. But the whole seemed no more than a festival of glow-worms.

"We have the real illumination up here," said Carleton.

Clara sat on the low retaining-wall, one hand

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supporting her as she leaned to look down, the other holding the scarf across her breast. Her pose, the turn of her face, with downcast eyes, the light cloud-like film about her head, made Carleton exclaim suddenly:

“You are exactly like a Lippo Lippi Madonna—how wonderful!”

Clara smiled. Then she gave a little cry and dropped the end of her scarf. A firefly had got entangled in the folds, and shone out for a moment in greenish-gold light.

“Oh, let it stay there!” begged Carleton, as she tried to shake it out. “It looks like a star in the cloud!”

“Yes, but I don’t like crawling things!”

“But it doesn’t touch you—do let it stay.”

She looked doubtfully at the creature wandering in its transparent labyrinth; then, as the rest of the party appeared, she called them to see it.

“Look, I am illuminated, too!”

“How pretty! You do look like a saint,” said Elizabeth.

Mrs. Langham shrieked. “Horrid creature, do let it go—it will sting you!”

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She sat down rather heavily on the wall, trying to disguise the fact that she was out of breath.

“No, it won’t,” said Clara. “I should like some more. Mr. Carleton, do see if you can catch some more for me. I ought to have as many lights as the Duomo!”

“At least there should be seven,” said Mr. Harris, and he quoted gallantly:

“ ‘The Blessed Damozel leaned out  
From the gold bar of Heaven . . . .  
She had three lilies in her hand  
And the stars in her hair were seven.’ ”

Carleton, as he brought back another firefly, imprisoned in his hand, murmured to himself:

“ ‘Her eyes were deeper than the depth  
Of waters stilled at even.’ ”

And Mrs. Langham said languidly:

“Well, really! I don’t think we need have climbed up here to see this, do you?”

“Oh, we came for the climb,” said Clara.

“Well, of course, if you enjoy it! This wall is damp, Clara; you will take cold.”

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“It is damp,” said Elizabeth calmly. “Rather bad, I’m afraid, for your rheumatism, Augusta.”

“Rheumatism, nonsense!” Mrs. Langham’s tone was decidedly acid. “But certainly it is too damp for comfort.”

“Let us go down,” said Clara, rising and shaking out her glittering captives.

Morelli turned and led the way. His silence was so unusual as to be noticed by at least three of the company. He saw evidently that Clara preferred Carleton’s companionship. And indeed she lingered now until the others were well started down the hill.

“One ought never to get my mother to do anything she doesn’t want to do,” she said moodily. “She can be more uncomfortable than anyone I ever knew. And she hates views. . . . They spoiled it all, didn’t they?”

“Not for me.”

“No, really?”

“It was only five minutes out of my hour.”

“How I wish I were as calm as you—as balanced! You are as calm as a rock—and I’m—variable as the light, quivering aspen! Any breath

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of wind shakes me—everything disturbs me. Oh, how I hate to go back down there!”

She had gone a few steps along the road, and now stopped. She turned to look up at Carleton, and the scarf blew back from her head and hung round her bare throat. Her face thrilled him, and her low, vehement tone. He felt rather uneasy, too. Was there to be some disastrous effect of her nervous excitement, of the strain he had seen her trembling under?

“But I am acting like an idiot,” she said, and hid her face in her hands, though not for the relief of tears.

“You need not go back just now,” he said. “I daresay you don’t want to.”

He would have liked to say much more than that. Things that were quite irrelevant to the matter in hand, if you came to that. She was really too pretty to need to make herself appealing in any other way! He was irritated with her for her childishness, and for the way it moved him. . . . All very well to say that her situation was a hard one—that her mother was a thorn in the flesh—that Morelli’s stormy courtship was

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disquieting. He could see all that. He pitied her—yes, decidedly; but why, after all, should she appeal to *him*? It was evident that she was quite undisciplined; part of her discomfort, no doubt, came from this unchartered freedom. There ought to be a strong hand over her whims and caprices. If there had been, he thought, she would never have got to this state of nerves.

He stood in silence till she looked up, then took her hand firmly and led her back to the wall.

“You’d better rest a little. We can easily overtake them if you wish.”

He spoke rather more colourlessly than usual; with all his mixed feelings about Clara, he was deeply moved by this sudden nearness. From strangers they had almost at once become intimate. She had thrown down the barriers of conventional reserve. In her lack of reason and control she was strangely, irresistibly interesting to him. She *had* appealed to him, and therefore she was ten times as attractive as before. Her very beauty was no more a picture, but a warm, compelling human force. His feeling for her, its expression made possible, became more intense. Pathetic,

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unhappy, emotional, beautiful, exasperating—he felt a keen desire to control, chastise, and console her!

She clenched her hand on the edge of the wall, bruising herself with the sharp stone.

“What shall I do?” she whispered. And in a moment repeated, “What shall I do? I don’t want to break down again. . . . I am afraid. . . .”

“There must be someone to help you,” said Carleton rather roughly. “If there is no one here that you trust——”

“There is no one anywhere.”

“But that’s nonsense. There must be. What you need first is a more reasonable way of living—a good physician——”

She made a hopeless gesture.

“I have had so many! . . . But I must do something. I have taken so much sleeping medicine, and I cannot sleep. . . . They cannot do anything for me. . . . And all the time my head is so terribly clear, that’s the worst of it. . . . I have been fighting for so long . . . but if I give up now——”

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Her head drooped, and her breast heaved with a long, despairing sigh.

“Give up? Don’t talk such ridiculous nonsense!”

“Oh, it isn’t. . . . You know, it’s the faces. Whenever I shut my eyes I see faces! Horrible ones—ugly ones—and beautiful ones that are horrible, too. . . .”

“Don’t talk in that way, for Heaven’s sake!”

“Very well, I won’t. But——”

“It’s absolutely absurd to let your nerves get the upper hand of you to that extent. What’s become of your will? . . . You’ve been working too much, staying in the house too much, seeing people too much. What you need is physical life, and a lot of it. Can’t you go and live outdoors somewhere—walk, ride, get rid of this idiotic idea of yourself——”

He stopped, acutely conscious of the roughness of his tone and her drooping, despondent look.

“Isn’t there anyone that you could go to—anyone that you like to be with?”

“No. I cannot go away from my mother——”

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just now. I mean we haven't money enough, and I can't think where I should go, anyway."

"Is there no one that you care for—more than you do for yourself?"

That's a curious question! he thought.

"Oh, yes . . . that is——"

"That is——"

"I am very fond of Francesca Rasolli——"

"I don't mean that. Is there no one you *love*?"

Clara shook her head slowly.

"No one at all—unless it is Francesca. But it isn't that I care about myself at all, you know!"

"No, but you can't get rid of yourself. If you were obliged to think of someone else—someone that you loved—you might be happy—and at peace, as you said."

Clara sighed and shook her head.

"I can't love people," she said.

"I don't believe you are as perverse as that. . . . Don't stand in your own light, at any rate. Love as much as you can."

She laughed under her breath, and Carleton felt an impulse to shake her, and to take her in his arms and kiss her into reason.

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“ I can't love any of those people down there,” she said suddenly. “ I hate them! ”

“ No, you don't. You didn't hate Morelli this afternoon, when you begged his pardon with tears in your eyes.”

“ Oh, I don't want to talk about them.”

She shivered, and looked about her rather wildly.

“ Are you tired? ” demanded Carleton. “ Can you walk on farther? ”

“ Oh, I'm not tired! ”

“ Then take my arm. . . . You will not mind if they have to wait for you? ”

“ No, I don't mind. Elizabeth is good to me. And they are—used to me, you know. They make allowances, don't cross me, and all that. And that's one reason I can't bear to be with them! I can't bear it. . . . And I must go away from here, for I distress everyone by staying.”

They were walking along the hill-crest toward the pine wood. Carleton halted.

“ But you are not warmly enough wrapped,” he said.

“ I am quite warm.”

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“ You were shivering.”

“ I assure you, I'm not cold.” She wound the scarf about her head and neck and took his arm again. “ Shall we walk far? ”

“ Till you are tired.”

They went on into the wood. Its shade looked black from without, but within it was broken by moving flecks and patches of light. The pine boughs met over the narrow road and swayed and murmured in the breeze. Then the trees thinned and there was another clear stretch. Out of the shadow they came into the moonlight. The liquid air was soaked with it—brilliant, thick. The colours of earth and sky were like those of enamel and precious stones—pale, yet deep blue and dusky green; and where a tree stood against the sky, it seemed cut in bronze.

Clara walked silent, as if in a dream; and Carleton seemed to himself burdened with a double consciousness—his own and hers. In his anxiety to say and do the right thing, he strove to realise what she must be feeling—the state of her brain, excited by drugs and sleeplessness to a point certainly not quite normal. It was all very well to

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take a moral attitude toward her lack of self-control; but to make that moral attitude effective was another thing. Preaching probably wouldn't do it. The "terrible clearness" she had spoken of, and all this outburst of hers, meant simply that she was for the moment irresponsible. She had lost the feeling for reality. She was walking in a cloud-world, in which only one thing was definite to her—her own self. Otherwise, she could never have treated him, a stranger, as she was doing—as though they were two disembodied spirits, free of time and circumstance! He felt a certain giddiness mount to his own brain with the strangeness of it, and the sense, too, that she was changed for him. She was near, her sweetness had the power of something that might be possessed—and at the same time she was inexpressibly remote. And he felt pain for her, too. She seemed to him cruelly wronged by circumstance. A passionate will to help and protect her sprang up in him. She must be protected from others, and—ininitely more difficult—from herself. . . . But how to touch without hurting her—or himself with her—that mental maze in which she was wandering?

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How to quiet that morbid sensibility and bring her back to the line of the normal? That her brain was wrong he did not for a moment believe; but that she had crossed the indefinite border, into that Debatable Land where the nerves and the will play at cross-purposes—the land that leads down into the desert of solitude—he felt with terror. She must be brought back to life, to sane human relations, to joy. But who could do it? He was afraid now even to speak. Here was the tangled skein, and to touch the wrong thread meant disaster. Perhaps disaster only to himself and his relation with her; but he was not going to risk that. He did not know exactly what to do; but instinctively mended his pace. . . . She walked lightly on beside him, her hand resting on his arm. Her veiled head just came to his shoulder. Looking down at her, he could see that her eyes were wide open and gazed straight ahead. . . .

The road they were following became narrower, more irregular, and broken. Finally, at the brow of the hill, it divided, and two paths led downward on the different sides. Carleton stopped. He had no exact idea how long they had been walking.

## *The Eternal Spring*

“I’m afraid it’s too damp to go down,” he said, “and the path looks rough. We can go back till we find the road going up, and climb a little farther, if you like.”

Clara sank down on a rock, and sighed deeply. “Yes, let us go back, then. How far have we come? I’ve never been in this place before.”

“Nor I. We’ve walked about two miles along this road, I think. Are you very tired?”

“No . . . yes, a little.” She dropped her face in her hands, and spoke uncertainly, like a sleeper suddenly awakened. Her figure looked limp, her dress trailed in the dust of the wayside, and she shivered in the damp air that rose from the valley.

“But *you* must be tired,” she said. “I ought not to have let you come so far.” She was making an effort to speak in her ordinary tone, but evidently her regained consciousness of him confused her. “I am very sorry. . . .”

“Oh, I should like to go on indefinitely! But we can’t—at least, in this direction. And, as it is, I’m afraid that if you’re a little tired now you’ll

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be too much so by the time we get back to the house. It must be an hour's walk."

"So much?" she exclaimed. "I had no idea we had come so far. But I can't be too tired! I think after this I can sleep."

"Then I shan't feel guilty at having brought you so far."

"Oh, I am the guilty one! You came because of me; and I am very grateful to you."

With this calm and prosaic conversation, they started back. And now Clara, who had walked as though on air, began to show weariness. Her steps dragged, and occasionally she stumbled. "I'm so glad to be tired!" she said, and laughed a little. Carleton held her hand more firmly in his arm. He was immensely relieved that her nervous pitch had been so easily lowered. Apparently he had done the right thing, after all. She was safe for the time. And the question that now filled his mind was of her attitude toward him. Had he been anything more than a temporary makeshift, a mere impersonal silence by her side? Could this experience, that meant so much to him, mean nothing to her? Had it been chance that

## *The Eternal Spring*

had given it to him, or some need in her that she might not be conscious of, that had impelled her toward him, even as he had been drawn to her? He could guess nothing from her manner. They were almost silent on the homeward walk. He left it to her to talk or not, and she said nothing, except, two or three times, "I'm so sorry I've been such a trouble to you!" And again, "I would go faster, but I am so tired!"

Trouble! Yes, she had troubled him, deeply, and this temporary quiet that she had gained brought no peace to him. For it was but temporary, he felt. She would be in need again—of some support, some guidance—if not of him. And why not of him? Perhaps it was just himself that she did need.

She needed, at any rate, a person with some will and common sense. She needed to live sensibly. She needed what all women needed—happiness and love. Love! It would be easy to give her love; but that alone would be only a torment to her. She herself must love, must give herself, and be properly taken care of, and properly controlled, as all women should be. Then these thorns of hers

## *The Eternal Spring*

would disappear—she would be all sweetness, all colour, and joy! The graceful white creature, so slender and maidenly, so delicate and warm!

She clung to his arm as they went down the steep road, and stumbled in pure weariness. He would have liked to take her up in his arms and carry her over all the rough places in her path.

## CHAPTER IX

**E**LIZABETH sat awaiting them in the hall, and they were coldly received. Clara made a brief, halting explanation.

“I could not think what had become of you—it is nearly twelve o'clock,” said Elizabeth, scanning severely the girl’s dishevelled appearance.

Clara, thus treated as a culprit, looked down, rather affrighted, at the hem of her dress, and her shoes covered with dust, and put up her hands nervously to pin back a loose lock of hair. Then, with a piteous glance at Carleton and a faint “Good-night,” she fled upstairs.

Elizabeth summoned Roberto to close the house, and led the way into the library, Carleton meekly following.

“Really, Barry, I think this is too bad!” She faced round upon him when he had shut the door. “I think you ought to have been a little more

## *The Eternal Spring*

responsible. What do you suppose Dr. Morelli thinks, and Clara's mother? She was almost in hysterics till I sent her off to bed."

Carleton suppressed a smile at this picture. "I am awfully sorry—it's my fault. We walked on a little way, and got into the wood, and I didn't know the place——"

"Then I think you might have had more consideration for me." Her tone was still cold, sharp, and angry, and her face looked astonishingly hard. She remained standing, and still held about her the wrap she had worn on the walk. Carleton realised suddenly her long watch, and now felt genuinely penitent.

"I beg your pardon a thousand times," he said. "I see how it must seem to you. But perhaps if I could tell you all the circumstances——" He paused, considering how far it would be right to Clara to tell them.

Elizabeth made an impatient gesture.

"Oh, the circumstances! I know them well enough. Clara had a caprice for walking, or talking, or staying out! But you should not have allowed her to do it. You might have realised

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how it would look. You kept us all waiting here for you an hour, till Morelli had to go, and I sent Mrs. Langham up, and now I have been waiting another hour. . . . Of course, I don't believe it was your fault, either, to begin with—only that you were weak about it. As for Clara—she is a perfect coquette, and perfectly heartless!”

“Oh, really, Elizabeth!” protested Carleton, “you misunderstand the whole thing. I don't think you'd be angry with her if you knew. The poor girl was simply wild with nerve-tension. She hasn't been sleeping, she's been taking fool drugs, and I think that long walk was absolutely what she needed. She's tired out now, and she'll probably sleep. . . . As for coquetry, I can only assure you that she hadn't any thought of me in what she did. She treated me with perfect impersonality.”

“Did she, indeed! And how do you know? How do you know what or how much she thought of you? You did not expect her to make love to you directly, I suppose? Don't be absurd, Barry.”

“Forgive me, Elizabeth, but in this case I think you are a little absurd,” said Carleton quietly.

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“ I daresay. But do you think I haven't seen what has been going on? . . . She talked to nobody but you at dinner; this afternoon she took you off alone to the music-room, and when I sent Morelli for her she was angry; to-night she rushed off with you, ahead of the rest of us; then she keeps you out for two hours because of her nerves—and still she has no thought of you! She treats you perfectly impersonally! Frankly, where is the absurdity—in your attitude or mine? ”

Carleton had been looking steadily at Elizabeth; but now he dropped his eyes—not from a sense of guilt, but because it hurt him to see her like this. She was fairly beside herself with the rage of jealousy. Instinct ruled her, and there was no use in appealing to her reason. And, besides, her instinct might be right. But, no less, this expression of it was unpleasant to Carleton; and it also made him deeply uneasy. Elizabeth's imperious way of calling him to account could only mean that she felt she had a claim on him that was practically a monopoly. And, indeed, had he not given her such a claim?

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He moved, and spoke sharply, not willing to think of this at the moment.

“I don’t believe we’d better continue this talk now. It’s late, as you say, and you’re tired. I am very heartily sorry for having caused this disturbance. I do keenly regret that part of it. It was an unfortunate accident. But—in the same circumstances I should undoubtedly do the same thing again.”

And now his deep-set eyes met hers steadily, and his face had the expression of calm resolve, to which its physical formation—square chin and heavy jaw—gave a certain grimness. Now it was Elizabeth who quailed. She moved to a chair that stood near, and clasped her hands for support on its back. Her lips trembled.

“You would not—consider my feelings, then, at all——”

The change from the imperious to the appealing was not accomplished all at once, but Carleton perceived that it was coming, and beat a hasty retreat, not to be outflanked.

“I have too much consideration for them to trouble you any longer to-night,” he said, still keep-

## *The Eternal Spring*

ing a firm front. "To-morrow I hope you won't think quite so hardly of me." And he went to the door and held it open for her.

Elizabeth searched his face desperately. No, there was no sign of softness, or of distress. He was not going to yield in the least. She motioned a dismissal to him, and bowed her head. But Carleton could not go in quite that way. He came back to her, put out his hand.

"Won't you forgive me?" he asked, and under the humility of his voice there sounded the unmistakable note of indifference. It was involuntary; he would have been glad not to know it himself, much less had he any wish to express it. But under its cruel power Elizabeth could not help trembling. She gave him her hand.

"Good-night, Barry," she said in a low, agitated tone. The anger of her aspect had become drooping and almost voiceless bitterness. Her unspoken appeal was that he should justify himself, take her in his arms. It was his tenderness that her jealous paroxysm had unreasonably tried to provoke, and now her misery made another attempt.

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But now Carleton was less vulnerable; and he dared not show pity as if it had been tenderness. He was up in arms to resist just this demand. Not one step farther could Elizabeth move him. But it was with an uncomfortable feeling of cowardice that he kissed her cold fingers and left her.

He went to his room, but with no idea of sleeping. He honestly meant to think, and to settle his course of action, for he realised that this night marked an important change of some sort; but instead he found himself living over again the time he had spent with Clara. Details of her look, her manner, and speech, came back one by one. Some were clear and vivid as light; some he had to search for, like the faded lineaments of the saint in the gold picture on his wall. But it was always her image that preoccupied, that filled his mind and his sense. She had really taken possession of him. No woman had ever so impressed him. She had set her mark clear and deep on his imagination. Her unhappiness touched his heart. Perverse, childish she might be, but that unhappiness was desperately real. Her beauty thrilled him in remembrance—it was appealing as it was exquisite.

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It was warm and sensuous with all its delicacy. The danger in the situation had sunk for him out of sight. Here was only a beautiful and interesting girl whom he might know intimately. There was no question of past or future. Just to realise her absorbed all his faculties. It was delicious to be so absorbed, and he let himself go. An emotional interest so keen was like new life to him. And if before he had been like a shell stranded on some dry beach, now a warm, living tide of feeling was flowing in upon him, enveloping him with liquid, mysterious murmurs, floating him out on a sea of infinite possibilities. . . .

In this state of being, he fell asleep; and it was broad day when he awoke with a sense of happiness for which at first he could not account. In fact, he could not account for it at all, since on examination it vanished in perplexity. Why, indeed, should he be happy? The thing that confronted him now was his position with Elizabeth, and the fact that he must have some kind of explanation with her. The present situation at La Fontanella was quite untenable. There must be a new order of things; and this in itself was disqui-

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eting, for what could he definitely hope for just now?

He admitted to himself that he dreaded to see Elizabeth, and he put off seeing her as long as possible. He knew that she was to be found in the library, unless, indeed, she might be even more accessible—on the terrace, perhaps. Therefore, he carefully secluded himself in his room and wrote letters. He had not before written a letter since leaving America. And now, though he took the occasion to write to his mother, he was mainly concerned with two other people. To one, a successful alienist whom he knew personally, he wrote a full account of Clara's history as he knew it, and asked for an opinion. The second person was a man of fifty, of wide social acquaintance, living in Washington; and Carleton asked him if he had known Charles Langham, or if he knew anyone who had known him.

Then, luncheon being announced, he went down with his letters in his hand, feeling somewhat like a truant schoolboy. He found Elizabeth with the Blandons and the inevitable Mr. Harris, in the hall; and she greeted him with conventional

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cheerfulness. He was on the alert for Clara's coming; but as they went directly into the dining-room, and he perceived the table laid for five, it was evident that neither she nor her mother were to be seen. Nothing was said about them; and Carleton was a good deal disturbed. He wondered if Elizabeth's treatment of Clara the night before had meant a painful break, and miserably hoped not. Elizabeth was unusually vivacious, and Carleton's preoccupation was not remarked, except by Mrs. Blandon. That lady demanded his opinion on various domestic problems with a strong flavour of autobiography, such as: Should a husband open his wife's letters? Should there be perfect confidence between husband and wife, or wasn't it a better policy to have some reserves? Should a man who liked to amuse himself quarrel with his wife because another man fell in love with her? Carleton's responses did not please.

"Your thoughts are wool-gathering, Mr. Carleton. May I have three guesses where they are? I can guess, too, why you haven't come to see me, though I have asked you"—she counted on her fingers—"one, two, three times. I wonder where

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that pretty Miss Langham is to-day—do you know?” She eyed him with frank malice.

“We must ask Mrs. Craven,” said Carleton; and he addressed Elizabeth: “We have been wondering, Mrs. Bandon and I, where Miss Langham is.”

“I believe she has gone to see the Rasollis,” Elizabeth responded as coolly. “And Mrs. Langham has an attack of nerves. She lost her maid this morning; and she has to find another in a hurry, as she is packing.”

“Oh, going away?” exclaimed Mrs. Bandon. “Isn’t that a pity—we shan’t have any more of that dear delightful Bach! Where are they going, Elizabeth dear?”

“I don’t exactly know yet. Clara wants some place in the hills, where it will be cool and she can work. . . . We shall all be flitting soon, I suppose. When do you go to England?”

Carleton was left in quiet for some moments, but not exactly in peace. Packing! That meant, no doubt, that there *had* been a quarrel. He felt wretched about it; and slow anger rose in him against Elizabeth for having made him and her-

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self ridiculous. What did she mean to do with him, anyway, supposing it in her power to dispose of him? And did she think that she could dispose of him? Could she, as a matter of fact?

Apparently she was no more in haste than he for a meeting. After luncheon she said that she and Mrs. Langham were going to drive to town on business. And in due time Mrs. Langham appeared, and bestowed on Carleton a cool bow as she got into the carriage. He was left, with the knowledge that they would bring Clara back with them, to the tender mercies of Mrs. Blandon, who poured coffee for the three men on the terrace, and made herself entertaining to two, at least, of them. Her husband apparently was entertained by everything she said or did; and Mr. Harris was embarrassed and pleased at having to defend himself from the charge of deserting her for Mrs. Craven.

Presently Carleton broke away, and went wandering about the house and garden—first into the music-room, where it was cooler than outside, then out to the bench in the shade by the fountain. The garden was beginning to show the effect of

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several hot days; and now, especially in breathless mid-afternoon, its varying greens seemed faded a tone lighter, and their surfaces slightly crisped. Even the endless murmur of the water pouring from its shell had a tired sound.

He hardly knew how the time passed till their return; it seemed long, yet the noise of the carriage-wheels surprised him. He went out to meet them. Mrs. Langham had just gone into the house; Clara and Elizabeth stood for a moment hand in hand as the carriage turned to go to the stable. On seeing Carleton, Elizabeth, whose face showed emotion, went quickly in, and in a moment Clara followed. But first she put out her hand to Carleton, and said:

“Do you know we are going away, to-morrow or the next day? . . . But I want to thank you—for last night. I want to tell you—it helped me to decide something important.”

She looked at him with a bright, soft gaze, and was going on. But Carleton kept her hand.

“You are going?” he almost stammered.  
“But where?”

“I don’t just know yet, till I have answers to

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some letters. . . . But I must go in—here comes the tea.”

Roberto carried the table and its furniture out under the cypresses, and Carleton waited there for the three ladies. Mrs. Langham did not appear again. Elizabeth came first, and made the tea; and she said to him, with a kind of nervous softness, “I want to have a talk with you, Barry, before dinner—do you mind?”

“Gladly,” he answered. “I want it, too.”

But he was watching for Clara with all his eyes and mind, and Elizabeth did not find it easy to talk about indifferent matters during the few minutes they were alone.

Clara came, and Carleton got up to place a chair for her. At the same time the bell at the gate rang, and some visitors came in—some Italians whom Carleton had not seen before—two men and a woman. Instantly the conversation became voluble, staccato, punctuated by gay laughter from the little Contessa, who smoked one cigarette after another rapidly, and who looked like a slim, neat, bright-eyed bird. They talked half in Italian, half in French, the latter to include Carle-

## *The Eternal Spring*

ton, who, however, easily dropped out, as he preferred. He was not sitting near Clara, and felt the more free to look at her. She was pale, but he was struck by the quietness of her look. It was almost peaceful—a peace out of pain; it was as though she were resting after a struggle. Her fingers were busy with the lacework she liked to do, and she kept her eyes on it a good deal, only lifting them with a smile now and then to make a brief comment or answer a question.

Elizabeth and the other three kept up the burden of the talk. At least, Carleton saw that it was a burden to Elizabeth, and that she grew more nervous as the tea-drinking was prolonged. He wondered what his talk with her would mean, what she wanted of him. And then he forgot all about her. Clara was there—soon she would be gone. Where, and could he follow her? His glances at her grew more frequent, more prolonged. He was not conscious of studying her, or even of feeling the grace of her bent head, her hands and figure. It was simply that he could not help looking at her. His thoughts, without coherence or order, whirled about her as a storm-centre.

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Gradually from their chaos an idea—or, rather, a single feeling—emerged, clear and powerful. It was the feeling that she was now near to him, that all the possibilities of life lay folded in her, that it was possible she might be the nearest and dearest of all beings to him forever. And he was so strongly moved that he totally forgot his surroundings, even himself. All his soul was in his eyes as he gazed at the girl—a gaze of fixed intensity, a deep look that concentrated many thoughts in its burning light.

How long it lasted he could not know, for he was not aware of himself till the interruption came—his name imperiously uttered by Elizabeth. She had put out her hand to take his empty cup, which he had been holding indefinitely, and as he met her eyes confusion came upon him. She got up instantly, asking her visitors to go into the garden to see the pink lotos. Clara rolled up her lace and went with them. Carleton stayed behind. He did not want even to talk with Clara at that moment. He waited for Elizabeth to come back and say what she had to say to him; and presently, after her people had driven off, she did come. She

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held herself, it struck Carleton, unusually straight, and as she sat down and motioned him into a seat facing her, her attitude was erect and rigid.

“Let us have it out, Barry!” she said breathlessly. “And first, I am sorry for last night. You will believe me in that, for you must know I am sorry to have made an idiot of myself. I was jealous, as you, of course, could see. I have made it all right with Clara. She is not going because of that—at least, I think she has quite forgiven me. And you will forgive me, too, won’t you? . . . I—I understand now. Last night I only suspected—I didn’t see how serious it was. Now I know.”

She stopped, breathing quickly; and the hard lines of her face showed what she suffered in controlling herself. The fluency of her words made them seem almost like a speech learned by rote; and yet she seemed absolutely sincere.

“Don’t, Elizabeth!” he begged. “You are right in one thing, though—there was nothing to suspect.”

“No, for what I suspected is certainty. Oh, Barry, don’t deny that you are in love with her!”

## *The Eternal Spring*

He would perhaps have denied or extenuated, but she forestalled him.

“Don’t deny it, or I shall think badly of you—and Heaven knows I don’t want to do that! Do you think I can’t see it now, when you look at her? Why, all the world might see! . . .”

Now she paused, and he might have denied, but could not or would not.

“As for anything between us two,” Elizabeth went on quickly, “of course, that counts for nothing. It was folly—I knew it at the time; I knew it meant nothing, though Heaven knows I tried hard to believe in it!”

She half-laughed, hysterically, and then the weeping-fit seized her by the throat.

“I am a fool,” she cried; “but don’t think too little of me! Don’t talk to her of me. . . . I’m not ashamed of caring for you, Barry; nor even that you tried to care for me and couldn’t. . . . I shall care for you still, and all the more for that. And I am glad, glad that it is not worse—that we didn’t make a worse mistake. . . . I don’t grudge you to her, Barry. . . .”

“Elizabeth!” he murmured wretchedly.

## *The Eternal Spring*

“No, I can't talk any more now!” she cried, and turned to flee. Then she made a desperate attempt to recapture her dignity, her magnanimity.

“I want to talk to you later about—Clara,” she said faintly. “Good-bye, now——”

They were standing in the cypress-shade, and yet in face of the blank windows of the house. But Elizabeth put up her arm, drew his head down, and kissed him.

## CHAPTER X

**E**LIZABETH released him as the lover of Clara. Thus for her he was both free and bound. His most definite sensation was thankfulness to be free. If she could but let it rest there! But that, perhaps, would have been to ask too much—of Elizabeth.

It was true, too, that he was “taken”—netted by the charm of a girl. It was true that Clara moved him as Elizabeth never had done—as no other woman had done. But he would much have preferred to be let alone, and that Elizabeth should recognise that she was not exactly concerned in this affair. But perhaps she could not be expected to see that—all at once. He was not eager for this further talk with her. He did not want to talk about Clara. But Elizabeth wanted it.

To begin with, in their talk later that night, she tacitly accused Carleton of having deceived her about the import of his adventure with Clara.

“Not that it is, I suppose, any of my business

## *The Eternal Spring*

now. Not that it matters!" she said passionately. "Except—yes, it does matter, for it destroys my idea of you, and I did want to keep that. You had always been honest with me, Barry!"

Carleton looked his despair. "You will have to take my word, Elizabeth, that I told you the truth."

"But, Barry, she broke to-day with Morelli absolutely! What else does that mean but that something happened to make her sure? . . . But I will believe you! It hurt me so much to think that you would evade, and shuffle, and hide the truth—and from me. Why should you hide it from me? Do you think I want anything but your happiness? Don't I give you up without question—even before you could show that you wanted it? . . . What would you have done if I had not seen?"

"I don't know," said Carleton.

"Don't you? But I can't see how you can doubt. There *isn't* any doubt, is there, Barry? No, there can't be—I saw! But you do love her?"

## *The Eternal Spring*

“Let us take it for granted, as a working hypothesis, that I do. At any rate, I am sufficiently interested in her.”

“It isn’t exactly the same thing!”

The place was that of their interview the night before, and the hour was almost as late; for they had been dining out, with Mr. Harris, on the other side of the city, and the three had had a long drive home. Elizabeth was quite gorgeous to-night in green gauze, with some opal chains; and her face, flushed with excitement, wore its tragic mask. It was dramatically bitter, as in the old days, when James Craven represented the barrier to bliss. She was as ready as ever to see barriers. In life’s steeplechase Elizabeth would never take a hazard.

It was plain, however, that she thought Carleton should profess himself ready for any and all. Perhaps her vanity could be soothed by seeing him rapt away in a mad infatuation. At any rate, she seemed irritated by his reserve.

“I thought you would want to talk to me about her,” she said.

“I thought you were going to talk to me,” he parried.

## *The Eternal Spring*

“ Ah, yes! I must do the talking! You are as niggard of your words as if you were coining your heart! ”

“ That's what I should have to do to please you, Elizabeth! But you said, if you remember, that you wanted to talk to me.”

“ And so I do.” She sighed, and set her mouth in its bitter line. “ But it is hard to be set aside so quickly. Not even to be confided in! . . . Ah, I'm afraid I shall always lag superfluous on the stage! I seem never to see when I *am* superfluous.”

“ Perhaps you're too ready to see it.”

“ What do you mean?” she asked quickly, with a glance rather wild and suspicious.

“ Only that you can never be superfluous to me.”

“ Oh!” Her exclamation, her laugh, were bitterness distilled—its very essence. Gall and wormwood twisted her mouth awry. “ Pray, don't be gallant, Barry! And let us leave my stupid self out of it. Oh, I know it isn't your fault that it got in! Now we'll put it out in the cold—wretched thing!—and shut the door on it.”

## *The Eternal Spring*

She got up from her chair beside the window and walked the length of the room and back. Her spangled dress undulated over the floor and glittered festively; and the restlessness of the little points of light glancing all over her was repeated in the glinting blues, and greens, and reds of her opals, and in her eyes and motions.

“Well!” she said sharply, as she came back and seated herself.

Carleton remained standing, and leaned against the window-frame, looking now out at the moonlit garden and now at Elizabeth, who sat silent for some moments, looking at the floor.

“It is rather hard to talk as I meant to, since you won’t say anything,” she finally said. “What I had in mind depended on the supposition that you were very serious about Clara; that you—well, would want to marry her. What on earth are you smiling for!”

“In wonder, Elizabeth, at your speed.” But Carleton corrected this irony, and became as grave as she. “Say that I am very serious—that I do want to marry her. What then?”

“What then? But I don’t like your tone!”

## *The Eternal Spring*

‘Say’ it—‘take it for granted’—I don’t understand you! Am I imagining the whole thing?”

“No. No, you’re not imagining it. But——”

Carleton moved suddenly, and went out on the narrow little balcony overlooking the garden. It had become clear to him that he could not possibly talk about Clara now—at least, to Elizabeth—and also that he could not let her talk to him. He knew what was in her mind—what had been in his own. But Clara’s misfortunes, her unhappiness, could not be discussed between them. The poor girl’s soul could not thus coldly be held to the light and turned this way and that! What Elizabeth thought mattered, after all, nothing. She could not give any real light. The taper of curiosity had no place here. Better darkness and silence.

A throb of pain bred the desire to escape, to be alone. And he turned back, to free himself of Elizabeth’s clutch.

“Tell me just one thing—when are they going, and where?”

“You mean to go with them?”

## *The Eternal Spring*

“Not exactly with them—probably after them.”

“Shall you speak first to Augusta? I fancy she expects it.”

Elizabeth had been wounded, and in that speech she showed her teeth.

“I don’t know,” said Carleton. “But at least you won’t anticipate me?”

It was a question in form, a demand in meaning.

“I—don’t—know,” she answered slowly. “If Augusta asks me—— In any case, I could only give my impression, and tell her that I am not in your confidence.”

She rose, and her whole attitude breathed offence, hostility. Carleton looked at her sadly. He realised by now her abysmal want of tact. But it hurt him to see that he had hurt her.

“We seem to have quarrelled,” he said. “Was that necessary?”

“I’m afraid it was,” Elizabeth answered with the same hardness. “It’s my fault, of course. I’ve always been quarrelsome. . . . I would have been content with half a loaf, Barry; but you don’t give me even a crust. It’s a little hard, all of a sudden, to be shut out so completely——”

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She took up her wrap from the chair.

“ Good-bye, then,” said Carleton gravely, offering his hand.

She looked at him, startled.

“ Not—not, of course, really good-bye? You don’t think of——”

“ Of course, I shall go away.”

“ Yes, I know, when *she* goes. But not till then! Stay on a few days—give me time to get over this a little; I couldn’t let you go like this. You’d think of me always as a jealous, horrible old woman! Say you will stay a little after they are gone—only a day or so. I won’t try to keep you long!”

“ If you wish, I will stay. I don’t enjoy going like this.”

“ Then we shall be reconciled—only not tonight! I must try to understand you—or to get used to the idea that I can’t understand you, and that—I don’t matter to you. That’s the bitter thing. I’ve lost you—for I was something to you once. How I wish you had never come back!”

. . . . .  
Carleton, when he had finally achieved solitude,

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was almost fain to wish it himself. It was very painful to him, this breach with Elizabeth—for it must be that, he saw, even if they were to be “reconciled.” Elizabeth could not bear to be deposed from her place of chief interest. He must go away, and instead of the haunting, pleasing memory of her that he had had, all these years, there would be the melancholy picture of his defection. Yes, it might have been better if he had not come back.

But then he might never have seen Clara—poor, sweet, unlucky Clara, who needed his help, and should have it, and all he could give, himself into the bargain, if she would.

Yes, but why should she? Who was he, after all, that a charming girl should take him in exchange for herself? He appraised himself as he must appear to her—a man of thirty, neither handsome nor brilliant, with no money or worldly position worth mentioning, and no prospect of being anything else than he now was. No, no, decidedly there was nothing here to tempt her! Morelli might have been the better match.

But—she had definitely broken with Morelli.

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And that must have been what she meant by her sweet speech to him: that last night had helped her to decide something important. And her look of peace and calm, after she had acted on that decision, proved that it was a right one. Perhaps that was what she had been thinking or feeling out on that long, silent walk with him. Perhaps her restless misery of the day before had been due to Morelli's pursuit, to her own uncertainty.

As to Elizabeth's idea that *he* had influenced Clara in any direct way—that it was interest in him that had moved her—he rejected it totally. Yet he had helped her somehow; she liked and trusted him. And she was unhappy. In spite of her attractions, she was not in the way of any brilliant worldly fortune. And, from what he knew of her character, he thought that she did not care for that. She had the artist's temperament and resources. So far, then, she might be content with what he could give—if she cared for him.

But, then, she was ambitious, they said, and she herself had said it; she wanted a "career." That was natural enough. She wanted some kind of expression; she was a creature full of life, desir-

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ing experience, desiring to escape from an uncongenial air. It was doubtless for this reason that she had thought of marrying and had given Morelli some hope—and then had not been able to care enough for him.

If this was the explanation, what became of the obstacle of the family history? What of that horrible shadow of madness that had hung over her? This was all vague to him. By turns it seemed to envelop her in fear and then to fade quite away. Was it, perhaps, under the influence of this fear that she had given up the idea of marriage? Had she thought to defy it, and then found that she could not?

There was only one way to get the answers to these questions—from Clara herself. And only if they should become intimate, if he could tell her that he cared for her, and she perhaps could come to care for him. Otherwise questions would, he felt now, be impossible.

As to the formal interview with Mrs. Langham, suggested by Elizabeth, his imagination revolted at it. The convention of declaring himself a suitor for Clara's hand was not in place here.

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Marriage might not be the outcome. At any rate, Clara must be wooed, not under the eyes, figurative or actual, of any onlooker. She was lonely of soul; she slept within a circle of fire, or a high wall of thorns. One did not approach her by a door politely opened.

He feared to approach her at all. She seemed to him like some infinitely delicate winged creature of the night, to be marred or broken at a touch. He rejoiced that she was going away from Elizabeth's neighbourhood. For in relation to *her*, Elizabeth seemed to be all blundering foot and heavy hand. But yet her going frightened him. He hesitated to follow her without her leave; and supposing she did not want him near her? Mrs. Langham, too, might make some trouble about the conventions. Apparently she thought now that some sort of apology or explanation was due from him. He was resolved not to make any, however; and yet he must have the mother's countenance. He could not ignore her, much as he disliked to recognise the convention of her guardianship over Clara. In the end, therefore, he made up his mind to have some sort of talk with

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Mrs. Langham before their departure, which was set for the next day.

But this was more easily resolved on than secured. A great deal of turmoil appeared to attend Mrs. Langham's preparations for moving. Two new maids, according to Elizabeth's report, were tried and dismissed, and meantime the unfortunate lady had to put up with the services of Clara's woman, who could not do her hair so that she was "fit to be seen." For this reason or some other, she remained practically invisible.

"Nerves," murmured Elizabeth when Carleton asked. "And the hot weather. But I daresay she'd see you."

"It isn't a formal audience I want," he objected. "I'll take my chance."

This was about noon, and he counted on seeing Clara first. But Clara, it developed, was to spend the day in making farewell visits. She did not appear until eight o'clock. Then, after much uncertainty, Mrs. Langham found herself equal to coming down to this last dinner at La Fontanella. She was frankly *triste*, and managed with

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unusual good-will to make her gloomy mood seem graceful.

“I can’t bear the idea of leaving this sweet place, and all you nice people,” she said plaintively. “I feel as if I were being dragged off to a desert. I do really hate the country. I shall have nothing to listen to but crickets and Clara’s eternal music. There will be nobody but tourists and peasants. I can’t think why she wants to go to such a place. I do wish you were all coming, too.”

“I wonder, if I should knock at your door sometime, whether I should be admitted?” said Mr. Harris romantically.

“Do try it, my dear Mr. Harris,” said Mrs. Langham indolently. Leaning her bare elbow on the table, she inclined her Roman head toward him and bent on him the full splendour of her dark eyes. Mr. Harris visibly blushed. “I’m sure it would be most charitable of you to try.”

“N-not that,” he stammered. “I should come like a beggar, asking alms.”

“Oh, beggars—horrid creatures! Don’t come like that, but walk boldly in and ask for dinner.”

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“ I’ll be as bold as I can.”

“ Really, do you think of coming up to Bagni? I thought you were going to England.”

“ Oh, I shall, later. But I think I may put in a few weeks in the Tuscan hills first. I hear your destination is a charming, quiet place. Do you know Montaigne spent a summer there? And Heine? And——”

“ No, really? I thought it was quite uncivilised.”

“ Is anything in Italy uncivilised? I can’t imagine it.”

Clara had scarcely spoken up to this point; but now she leaned forward and addressed Mr. Harris.

“ It is quite civilised enough. Francesca Rastelli goes there every summer, and she says it is charming and quite off the track of tourists. I hope we shall see you. We are going to have a queer old stone house, and I don’t dare ask anybody to stay in it till I see it, but——”

Mrs. Langham interrupted bluntly.

“ Good gracious, child, we can’t have people to stay with us. We shall be lucky if we can get food

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for ourselves—I don't suppose there's a cook in the place. Mr. Harris will be quite comfortable at the hotel, I daresay."

"I shall be quite happy if I may just look in on you now and then," said Mr. Harris, looking gratefully at Clara. And then, that his allegiance to Elizabeth might not be thought to waver, he turned to her with a reference to England.

Clara became silent again and looked sad. She sat between Elizabeth and Carleton, and there could be no talk of the sort Carleton was impatient for. The meal seemed hours long, and in fact there was an extra course of sweets in elaborate and curious form—the farewell offering of the *chef* to the departing guests. But when it was over, Elizabeth managed immediately to leave Carleton alone with Mrs. Langham at one end of the terrace.

"What a day this has been!" she sighed. "That's the worst of these late springs—the hot weather pounces on you suddenly. After all, I am glad we are going, pleasant as this has been. Do you go to England, too?"

The tone of this enquiry made Carleton think

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that she was deliberately smoothing his path—very likely on a hint, or something broader, from Elizabeth.

“ I don’t think so. In fact, I think I shall stay in Italy this summer.”

“ Oh, really! I should have supposed a bracing atmosphere—say St. Moritz—would be better for you.”

“ But I don’t want to go to St. Moritz. What I should like to do is to what Mr. Harris contemplates.”

“ But he contemplates Elizabeth.”

“ I mean I should like to go to Bagni.”

“ Elizabeth won’t forgive me if you desert, too.”

“ But in any case I should not go to England.”

Carleton remained grave and Mrs. Langham flippant.

“ You alarm me. You know Elizabeth doesn’t like people changing their minds.”

“ I can’t help that. But I’m quite sure my plans don’t seem important to her. I hadn’t made up my mind, you see, anyway. I haven’t had any mind since I got here.”

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“No, really? You have done remarkably well without one, then. I should not bother getting it back if I were you.”

“But I have got it back. One sign of it is that I know what I want to do.”

“That’s a bad sign—since in this world one can’t often do what one wants to do. Is that the only sign you have?”

“At present the only one. I hope, however, that I may develop wit enough to accomplish what I want.”

“Oh, if it depended on that! But these things, dear Mr. Carleton, depend on Fate.”

“My going to Bagni, for instance?”

“Oh, are we still talking about that? I can’t see what else your going depends on.”

“Supposing it depended on the chance of seeing you and Miss Langham? For I should certainly not go if I were not to see you.”

“But why shouldn’t you see us? I’m sure we shall be only too glad to see anybody—you in particular.”

This doubtful cordiality was as much as Carleton needed at present.

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“Then I shall hope to go,” he said.

Clara had not come out with the others, and he had been watching the doorway for her, wondering if she meant he was not to have a chance to speak with her alone, or if he might find her on search. Elizabeth, at some little distance, was listening to Mr. Harris over the coffee-cups. Carleton, forced to wait Mrs. Langham's pleasure, found the quarter of an hour that she was now pleased to keep him frightfully long. She talked on in a bored way about the nuisances of travelling in Italy; and finally abruptly rose and gave him her hand.

“I shall very likely not see you in the morning—we start at some barbaric hour. So, good-bye!—or, rather, *a rivederla*, since we may meet later.”

Carleton walked beside her to the door. She called out to Elizabeth:

“Where is Clara, do you know? She must come up early. I am frightfully tired, and I'm going to bed. Good-night, dear.”

Without waiting for an answer, she went on with slow grace. Mr. Harris hurried after her.

## *The Eternal Spring*

“Mrs. Craven says she thinks Miss Langham went to the music-room to sort out her music. Shall I give her any message?”

“Oh, no, thank you.” Carleton, standing in the hall, saw her radiant smile at Mr. Harris, and wondered. Why should she care about that fellow? She gave the flattered professor her hand and a farewell that, compared to Carleton’s, was quite emotional. Was it, he wondered, meant as a snub to *him*?

He went out by the side-door into the courtyard, saw a light in the music-room, and walked slowly toward it. His heart was beating hard—he admitted to himself that he was afraid!

## CHAPTER XI

CLARA stood by the piano, looking over a heap of loose music, among which were a good many manuscript pages. The chosen ones she tossed over to her maid Julie, and Julie arranged them in a neat pile. Clara had a pink rose in her hair, and an Egyptian scarf shot with gold hung in heavy, shimmering folds over her shoulders and arms. She greeted Carleton with a smile.

“ I’ve just been saying good-bye to your mother—and I thought perhaps I might not see you, either, in the morning, or at least might not have a chance to speak to you,” he said gravely.

“ No, we go so early. I am glad to see you. It has been so pleasant here, hasn’t it? And Elizabeth has been so—more than kind. She has been so good to me! I don’t know why she should be. I am only glad on her account to be going away, for I am a troublesome person.”

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She spoke in quick, soft sentences, her eyes on the music, which she went on sorting.

“I don't think anyone except yourself can be glad that you're going. . . . But perhaps you'll find the change and the higher air a good thing. You'll walk and live outdoors more, I hope.”

“Yes; and they play tennis there, and I shall ride, perhaps. And I hope to do some work. Did I tell you I am trying to write something—a little opera?”

She looked up and laughed quite gaily.

“No, are you, really? Do tell me about it.”

“Oh, very likely I shall not do anything with it. I have written some songs, but I never tried anything so large as this. It's short—two acts, or, rather, one, with an intermezzo—on the theme of Andersen's story, ‘The Little Sea-Maid.’ Am I not ambitious?”

“You are very secretive, I think. Why didn't you tell me before?”

“Why should I? It doesn't amount to anything yet, and probably never will. It is only a young-lady attempt, a way of passing the time.”

## *The Eternal Spring*

“ I should like immensely to hear more about it. Perhaps I may, if I am so fortunate as to see you at Bagni.”

She raised her head with a quick motion and looked sharply at him.

“ At Bagni? Do you think of going there? ”

“ Yes, I think of it. I told your mother that I hoped to go, and she was good enough not to freeze me out, though I can't say she welcomed me very warmly! ”

“ But I thought you were going to England? Perhaps you are going later.”

“ No, I'm not going at all.”

Clara held a few last sheets of music in her hands and gazed at them; then gave them to Julie and dismissed her with the sheaf to finish packing. She sat down on the piano-stool and looked up at Carleton.

“ And Elizabeth? Does she know—you are not going? ”

“ She knows it quite well. She knows I am going to follow you, if I am permitted.”

“ Permitted! ” She appeared quite aghast.

“ I mean by that, if you will say that I may come to see you sometimes.”



*“Clara stood by the piano, looking over a heap of loose music.”*



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“But, of course—of course, we shall be glad to see you. Why should you ask with all this formality?”

For reply, Carleton looked straight into her eyes. She bore this look for a long moment, then hid her face in her hands.

“Oh, I am sorry!” she said passionately.

She turned away from him, her face still hidden, and leaned against the keyboard. Carleton waited, hardly daring to look at her. The scent of the rose in her hair, the trembling glimmer of gold on her shoulder, came to him blurred, yet poignant. At last she looked up, and her eyes were wet and misty.

“I don’t want you to come!” she cried.

“You—don’t mean that, do you? You won’t—forbid me?”

“I can’t forbid you. But I don’t want you to come—now.”

“Then, if you don’t want me, I can’t, I suppose,” said Carleton dully.

“No, I don’t mean that I don’t want you. I mean—I don’t know what I mean. . . . Yes, I do know, too. I mean that I ought not to want you to come.”

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“ Oh, if that is all! ”

A flash of joy lit up his face, and he made an impetuous dash at her hand, which she snatched away.

“ All! But it is everything! Oh, I am sorry! ”

She looked so the picture of grief that Carleton did not dare look happy.

“ There’s nothing to be sorry for, ” he protested. “ Nothing that you can help, at least. ”

“ No, I can’t help it now. But I might—— ”

“ What might you have done? ”

“ I needn’t have done what I did! You are sorry for me now, and I wanted you to be. I can’t help wanting people to care for me, and be interested in me—and I try to make them! And then it all ends in unhappiness and I am ashamed! ”

Again the tears brimmed over her eyes, and she struck her hand roughly against the wood and sprang up.

“ Elizabeth was right to speak to me as she did, and to be angry! I deserved it! I had a bitter scene to go through yesterday, too. It’s all my fault. And now you—Elizabeth—— ”

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“It isn’t your fault. It’s nothing you’ve done, or haven’t done. It’s nothing you can change. You can’t help being beautiful and lovable.”

“Oh, that’s just what I’m not! I am hard and selfish. And it’s just for that reason that I try to be attractive. I have an awful thirst for admiration and affection. I try to get more than I ought to have. And sometimes I get it—and I am punished!”

Carleton saw Morelli in his mind’s eye, and behind him a vague crowd of ghostly lovers; he did not exactly like being relegated to the companionship of these shades.

“You won’t be punished through me,” he said quietly. “Nor have you got anything more from me than you ought to have. Nor shall I offer you anything you ought not to have—nor anything you don’t want. If that is understood, may I come to Bagni? For my own great pleasure, and on my own responsibility? I’m not exactly a spring chicken, you see, and I have looked out for myself for a great many years.”

“Ah, now you’re laughing at me,” said Clara, flushing. “I don’t deserve *that*, at least.”

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“Nor do I deserve that you should think so, do I?”

“I must go now,” Clara responded. She dried her eyes and looked rather implacably at Carleton. “That wasn’t a pretty speech of yours.”

“No, but I don’t in the least want to make you pretty speeches. I shall not make any when I come to Bagni.”

“‘When’—you are very confident! And if you are going to make unpleasant speeches, why should I want you to come?”

“There is a golden mean, isn’t there?”

“Yes, yours—silence! You’re safer there!”

“Then, may I come and be silent?”

“I rather like silence.”

Clara looked round the room vaguely, and repeated, “I must go now. Good-night.”

“Will you play something before you go?”

“Something short and easy?”

Slipping down on the stool, she struck some rough, crashing chords in the bass. Then she played a Tarentelle, full of devilish leaps and bounds, the contortions and convulsions of the spider-bitten. With a reckless air she demanded:

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“Do you like that?”

“No.”

Clara's eyelids drooped. She became meditative, demure, meek. Then she began to play a quaint, plaintive melody, and in a voice light, sweet and exquisitely true, she sang:

“Fair Daffodils, we weep to see  
You haste away so soon;  
As yet the early-rising sun  
Has not out-lived his noon.  
    Stay, stay,  
Until the hasting day  
    Has run  
But to the evensong,  
And, having prayed together, we  
Will go with you along.

“We have short time to stay as you,  
We have as short a spring;  
As quick a growth to meet decay,  
As you, or anything.  
    We die,  
As your hours do, and dry  
    Away,  
Like to the summer's rain,  
Or as the pearls of morning's dew,  
Ne'er to be found again.”

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The song died away softly, in appealing sweetness. Carleton had not heard her sing before.

“You beautiful creature!” he murmured.

“Do you like that?” she asked.

“I adore it. Won’t you sing it again?”

“Oh, no—it’s late; really, I must go.” She rose and shut the piano. “It is good-bye to this dear place,” she said dreamily. “How sweet it is here. How lucky Elizabeth is to be able to live here always! How tired I am of wandering about!” She went slowly toward the door, and paused for a farewell glance.

“Good-bye, dear room!”

They crossed the courtyard together and entered the hall.

“And now I must say good-bye to you,” said Clara stopping, “for I shall not see you in the morning. Pray don’t come down. I hate people to see me off!”

“Good-bye, then, till we meet at Bagni.”

“Ah, you may think better of that!”

“I shall think better and better of it—and I shall think of nothing else, Clara.”

Her last look at him was melancholy; but it

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could not dim Carleton's happiness. He speedily forgot all that did not chime with his mood; and remembered only her exquisite colour against the gold scarf, her light, plaintive voice, her subtle eyes, her tears, her willingness to see him again. And he wondered how soon it would be decent for him to go.

## CHAPTER XII

**T**HE Blandons were at La Fontanella the last few days of Carleton's stay; perhaps to play propriety. They had closed their villa, and in a week they, with Elizabeth, were to travel to England, Mr. Harris following anon; and they were all to be neighbours in Surrey. They made those last days superficially gay and easier for Carleton to get through. Nevertheless, it was not exactly a happy time.

La Fontanella had not yet begun to be dismantled, as it would be in part before Elizabeth left. All its treasures kept their order, yet the place had to Carleton a deserted air. Its peace and charm for him were wrecked; now it was melancholy and forlorn.

He thought more often in these days of James Craven; and now part of the deserted look of the villa seemed to come from the absence of that quiet old figure, in the Roman cloak and broad hat, pacing the terrace or sitting at a table covered

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with books and papers in the garden. Craven had loved, had made, in fact, every detail of the chosen beauty of La Fontanella—the place was his creation. Carleton realised now how completely Craven had fitted into it, how it had belonged to him. And he reviewed with unpleasant feelings his own scheme of stepping easily into the dead man's shoes.

He thought he saw Mr. Harris preparing to make the same mistake, and sardonically he watched the progress of the professor's wooing. Mr. Harris was cerebral, conscientious, self-conscious. He had spent all his mature years in an atmosphere of somewhat defeminised femininity. Week after week, year after year, he had lectured calmly on the science of poetry and romance, to rows of girls who gave him never a flutter nor thrill. And now in his middle years, when he might justly have been thought immune, romance had seized upon him. The charm of Italy had laid violent hands upon him; the pleasant lure of La Fontanella had taken him captive. He had fallen in love with these things, and with Elizabeth.

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That Elizabeth was not displeased might be guessed from the fact that she was virtually taking him with her. Carleton was half consoled, half disgusted. For the aesthetic fitness of things it would have been better that Elizabeth should resign herself to being lonely and Mr. Harris remain a bachelor. Middle-aged ardours made, somehow, just now an unpleasant spectacle! These things belonged to youth, to the spring. Spring, youth, love—they were one and the same! And as to the belated flowers of a frozen clime, poor, pale stunted blossoms they must be, hardly deserving the name. Could one love at forty and fifty, with life virtually lived, fixed in a mould of habit, with all the legacy of memory and regret? The pink flush of spring could not come back to the brown boughs of autumn. Joy, passion—they were for the freshness of youth! To miss them then was to miss them forever. *Flower o' the quince——!*

Carleton contemplated his own egotism unabashed. He saw it objectively—it was a Fact, in harmony with the great march of things. After this fashion the world is made, and perpetually

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made anew in the same image. Love—what is Love but the supreme self-assertion of the Ego! The great demand, made under all the forms of an offering, a sacrifice!

Selfish? Of course, he was supremely selfish. Elizabeth now was to him almost as though she had never been. He had never given her any part of himself. All the past of his relations with unloved women, superficial as the writing on a slate, was washed out now. There was nothing but the future. . . .

It was like a resurrection, a new birth. A few weeks since he had seemed dead, physically and mentally. And now, to his own feeling, he had cast that dead skin, like a lizard, and come out fresh and agile. The sap of spring had risen and rejuvenated the tree. But no! that figure displeased him. For the tree had bloomed before, and he never! This was his real springtime. In spite of those bare spaces on his temples, those lines and the seared look that comes of irregular living, he was, after all, consumedly young! The hurry and confusion of youth and spring were in his pulses. An intense restlessness came upon him

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so soon as Clara had gone. "*I let Lisa go, and what good in life since? . . .*"

La Fontanella was empty to him now. He longed to be gone after her. Withal, he was rather abashed to find out how clearly the situation was understood. Mrs. Blandon did not spare him.

"How oddly it has all turned out!" she cried with her candid malice. "You know, we all thought it was to be a romance—you and dear Elizabeth—a long-lost friend from over-seas, and all that. And now we have two romances instead of one, and it seems that I discovered Mr. Harris just for Elizabeth. I am awfully good at that—discovering people for other people. But I don't see exactly what good it is to me."

"You seem to get a lot of amusement out of it," Carleton suggested.

"Oh, amusement, yes—but amusement is so trivial. What I like is interest; but, of course, one can never be really interested in other people's affairs. Frankly, though, I am more interested in yours than you might think."

"It's very kind of you."

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“In other words, ‘Mind your own affairs’? But the great trouble is, I’ve got none of my own just now. I do envy you!”

Her inquisitive gaze, critical, satirical, became quite intolerable to Carleton. He could not see anything essentially humorous in the situation, unless it were Mr. Harris. For the moment the obvious fact escaped him that the love-affairs of other people are always rather ridiculous, when they are not tragic, and sometimes even then. He felt a possible element of tragedy in his own case, and Mrs. Bandon’s jocularities grated fearfully upon him. He did not like her pitying allusions to Morelli, who, she said, had rushed off somewhere away from Florence. Still less could he bear any reference to Clara. His desire to escape from this atmosphere of curiosity and gossip became overwhelming.

He stayed but four days after the departure of the Langhams, and for the first two of these he did not see Elizabeth alone. It was painful to him to see her at all. She went about her usual avocations calmly enough, but with a joylessness of aspect that seemed to fling a weight of reproach

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on him. And he felt the weight; he reproached himself. Yet, as he looked back on the history of their relation, it all seemed to him inevitable, and he could not but feel that he would act in the same way again, if it were to be lived over. He had been honest, after all, to himself and her.

When the day for his leaving was actually set, Elizabeth made an effort over herself not to appear unhappy. And this seemed to touch the spring of her old kindness for him, and set it flowing again. She softened, the hard mask was put aside, she showed herself to him frankly sad, but no longer bitter nor exigent. They had a long talk the day before he was to go, on a late afternoon in the garden.

To begin, Elizabeth was remorseful for her behaviour of the past week. She mourned over her own selfishness and egotism, and Carleton's spoilt pleasure.

“And I did want you not to go away, hating me, and this place, and all! You won't believe it, but that really is what I wanted you to stay on for a little longer—to see if I could not give you some pleasanter recollection to carry away. . . .

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More egotism! For you will forget all about me, and in a few weeks it won't matter to you whether I am pleasant or unpleasant. And, even so, it has been horribly hard for me to show even this amount of decency! Ah, I am badly trained—or, rather, I am not trained at all! I am a spoilt child—at my age! I can't help sulking. . . . Are there people, do you think, who really can command themselves, and behave prettily when they are boiling inside? I can't believe it. Yet I know that most people behave better than I."

"Elizabeth, no one is better, more sweet! Why should you think you have any amends to make to me? It shows your sweetness that you should think so. . . . It is so much the other way that"—he paused and retreated from this quaking ground. "No! It is not that, either. You cannot feel that, and it is false sentiment for me to feel it. You don't feel that I have behaved ill, do you, Elizabeth?"

He put his hand on hers appealingly; and she with both her hands seized his in a pained grasp and bent her head low. The broad brim of her hat hid her face from him, all but the sensitive,

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thin-lipped mouth and pointed chin. It was a long moment before she could speak.

“No, Barry, no—it was all inevitable.”

He looked at her, much moved. Her sad, passionately gentle voice and clinging hands brought back that appealing Elizabeth whose charm had dwelt with him so many years. And now that she abnegated all claim, she had more than her old power; her power and charm were real, and in her sadness and loneliness she was deeply touching. He saw her closed lips quiver. Then she spoke again.

“It is all right now. I care only that we shouldn't part in anger, or coldness—or disgust. You must have been disgusted with me, and I did deserve it. But yet I do deserve, too, that you should think a little kindly of me, for I have so real an affection for you, and always shall have——”

She raised her head and looked at him with bright, sad, caressing eyes, and Carleton kissed her hands and took them in his with a firmer clasp.

“And I for you,” he said. “It has always been so, ever since I first knew you. It made me

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wretched to quarrel with you and lose you. But now we shall be as good friends as ever—perhaps better.”

“ Ah, no,” said Elizabeth. “ At least, not for some time. You will be too absorbed to have any place for me. I do so hope you are going to be happy! . . . If you are not, I shall blame myself because you met her here! ”

Carleton laughed uneasily. “ You mustn’t take that on your conscience! That was Fate.”

“ Yes, Fate! It seems so to you, of course. She is the only person out of all the world, I suppose. . . . Ah, well, I shall croak like the raven, if I’m not careful. I can’t believe there is such a thing as happiness in the world. But you are full of faith, I daresay—or at least you ought to be.”

“ I believe in pleasure, in joy, and interest. The first two are occasional, the last is constant, with me, at least. I get as much out of life as one ought to expect.”

“ Oh, if you pitch your expectations low! But why not expect everything, as a child does? I have done so all my life.”

## *The Eternal Spring*

“ I expect everything that I’m capable of.”

“ Yes, but how do you know what you are capable of? I feel in myself even yet any amount of unmapped country. Even now I can’t help feeling that things may happen, that—somehow, sometime—I may come into the Land of Heart’s Desire.”

She looked out into the falling veil of the fountain dreamily.

“ It is not of this earth,” Carleton said gently. “ And for us who enjoy the earth so keenly, least of all. Sometimes I think that for the religious temperament there is happiness. St. Francis, perhaps, was happy. Those who reach the last refuge seem to leave unhappiness behind! But to a pagan like myself the charm of temporal things is all that seems real, and that is never separated from the feeling of their evanescence, from the feeling of the essential cruelty of life. To be happy, one must be able to soar above Death, to conquer it. But Death conquers me, and I see all that gives me pleasure, that I love, swallowed up in a black gulf——”

Elizabeth shuddered.

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“ Don’t say it! I try to believe that it isn’t so. There must be some way given us to atone—for unkindness, coldness—otherwise life is too cruel! You are young, Barry, or you couldn’t be so calm about it—wait till you have suffered! Perhaps you will turn religious. It seems to me it is the sensuous temperament that *is* religious. St. Francis and St. Augustine were both rakes in their youth! ”

“ Yes, but it is in youth that the turn takes place—it’s only youth that’s capable of it, of the passion of faith.”

“ Ah, youth, youth! All the world belongs to it—and even the next world, according to you! ”

Carleton gazed with half-closed eyes at the swaying veil of water, at the green foliage against the purpling sky, and the tops of the black cypresses boldly jutting into the blue gulf of air.

“ Ah, but the fulness of this earth belongs to us! What beauty, what sweetness! Here upon this bank and shoal of time I’ll jump the life to come! Only let me come back again to the earth—as one of those fat, green lizards in the wall, or one of those gorgeous fish in the fountain—I

## *The Eternal Spring*

should be content. A myriad of little lives like that would please me. And the lizards are knowing fellows, too! Do you remember Heine says one of them looked just like a certain learned professor at Göttingen?"

"Ah, you used to read Heine to me! Here by the fountain. How he amused us, poor Heinrich!

*"Aus meinem tiefen Schmerzen  
Mach' Ich die kleine Lieder——"*

"And you used to sing to me," said Carleton. "Won't you sing now?"

"I never sing any more," said Elizabeth.

But then, leaning a little away from him, and watching the fountain, she sang under her breath one of the Lieder, ending:

*"Wenn du sagst, Ich liebe dich,  
So muss' Ich weinen bitterlich!"*

Then she looked at Carleton with bright, tragic eyes.

"But you never did say it! Barry, you were so wise! But I said it, do you remember? One day here in the garden?"

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“I remember. But you didn't say it for me, myself.”

“Who knows? But it doesn't matter now. And you will have the reward of your wisdom. Oh, forgive me!” she cried. “Help me not to be bitter! Ah, but you can't help me! I *am* old and bitter at heart. But if only I could keep from being bitter to *you*. If only you would love me a little, just a very little, I shouldn't——”

In tears she sank on his shoulder. Barry kissed her loyally. It was her real farewell to him. And here by the little fountain, with the cool wind rising and stirring the leaves about them, and the warm sky glowing magically toward sunset, one long episode of his life came to an end.



PART II  
THE HILLS



### CHAPTER XIII

CLARA came along the road in the shadow of the chestnut-forest, singing gaily. She had a bunch of forest-flowers in her hand—wild forget-me-nots, tiny pinks and bachelor-buttons—and her hat, of the light straw made by the peasant-women, was pinned to the side of her short skirt. Ahead of her, where the road turned into the little Piazza San Martino, were two barefooted, almond-eyed children. They stopped and stared at her shyly. The girl had a pailful of wild strawberries, tiny scarlet drops of pure sweetness and fragrance; it represented the morning's work of the two children in the forest. Clara caught sight of it and hailed them, pausing in her song.

*“Buona sera, ragazzina mia, volete vendere questi fragoletti?”*

The girl stammered assent, looking up askance, with half-timid, half-bold eyes. Clara beckoned

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them to follow her, and went on into the Piazza, warbling lightly:

“ Where the bee sucks, there suck I:  
In a cowslip’s bell I lie——”

She walked with an elastic, easy step, swinging along as though she were still treading the springy turf of the forest-floor instead of the stone-paved roadway. Her black hair was blown back from her face by the light breeze. She had a fresh colour, and she smiled contentedly, and tilted her head from side to side in time to the gay melody. The two children followed warily, paddling in the dusty grass by the roadside, for the cobbles were hot to the foot.

It was mid-day, and the Piazza, which was little more than a terrace near the top of the hill, was almost deserted. Two yawning bathwomen sat before the door of the bathing-establishment, whose trim stucco front made one side of the Piazza. On the opposite side, where through a wide archway the road went its winding way down the hill, the keeper of the wine-shop sat before his door, playing cards with three companions. Be-

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tween was an enormous wall of stone, through the midst of which a long flight of steps led up to the hotel on the hill-top. At the foot of this wall was a fountain, where a woman was drawing water in a copper jug. The fourth side was made by a row of low stucco houses, a continuous façade of light buff-colour, and a low wall, lined with a row of great plane-trees, from which one looked down sheer three hundred feet into the narrow valley. The plane-trees shaded half the Piazza; but the other half was a dazzling glare of sunlight on grey stone, white stone and stucco.

Clara went to the door of the house nearest to the row of plane-trees and opened it. The door was composed of two great shutters, and these, as well as the shutters of the windows, were closed against the sun and dust. Clara went in and got her purse, a frivolous affair of silver links, and paid the children their price, with ten *centesimi* over for luck, and a piece of red ribbon for the black-haired girl. The cook, a young, light-haired woman, brought a dish for the strawberries, and Clara sent the smiling children away with a promise to buy all the strawberries and mushrooms they

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could bring, *tutti giorni*. Then she went into the house, and the cook, Ida, closed the shutters of the door, and informed her that the Signora was taking her *collazione* in the *sala di pranzo*.

Within its thick walls the house was cool as a well. It was deep and narrow like one, too; for it was built into the steep side of the hill, and from one story and a half at the front, facing the Piazza, it shot down four stories at the back. It was all stone, and concrete, and plaster, in dull, cool greys and greens; and the stairway that led down into dimness had the gleam of water at the bottom, where a spring filled a small reservoir sunk in the floor.

The double doors of the main living-room were open on the entrance-hall; and Clara glanced in for a moment on a scene of confusion. A grand-piano stood in the middle of the floor, its lid heaped with half-emptied trunk-trays. Trunks were ranged about the walls. Drifts of tissue-paper littered the floor. The chairs were buried under mounds of wearing-apparel, and the tables covered with hats, slippers, lacquered boxes, and other trifles of elegance. Fidelio, the poodle,

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lay on his purple cushion under the piano and growled discontentedly as he perceived Clara. She threw up her hands and turned to go downstairs.

In the dining-room, one flight down, Augusta Langham sat at table, with her new maid waiting upon her. In this room, also, there were trunks, half-unpacked. From it chambers opened on either side, and at the back a wide door gave on a balcony which overhung the deep ravine and faced the high green hills. Mrs. Langham sat with her back to the view. She wore a purple morning-gown; her hair was carefully waved and dressed. She was trying to eat an omelette, but when Clara came in she gave up the attempt and sent the maid, an Englishwoman of severe appearance, for fresh coffee.

“That’s good—I’m hungry,” said Clara, sitting down. “I’ve had a jolly walk in the woods. And I’ve got some wild strawberries for you. Did the cream come? The woman promised it for this morning.”

“I believe so,” said Mrs. Langham dejectedly.

“I had trouble enough to get it! . . .

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We don't seem to have got very far toward settling, do we?"

Mrs. Langham sighed deeply, and threw herself back in her chair.

"How *can* we? There is no place to put anything, no one to do any work! Clara, how *could* you think we could get on in this place?"

"But I think we can get on very well. I like it. . . . What is there for breakfast?"

"Bread—butter—figs—an uneatable omelette. How you could conceive of taking one of these peasants for a cook!"

"But, Mama, we had a good dinner last night—you know we had! I daresay she has something else down there. How nice those little pats of butter look on the vine-leaves!"

Clara began eating, with the spirits born of fresh air and exercise. The English maid came in with a dish of chicken, rice, and tomatoes, and the coffee. Then she put the strawberries on the table and Clara fell upon them eagerly.

"Oh, how delicious! Just smell them! Now, I think this is an awfully good meal!"

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"Field, you can go up now and unpack," said Mrs. Langham languidly.

The Englishwoman gave an audible sniff as she went out and closed the door, and Mrs. Langham nodded tragically across the table.

"That woman will be absolutely useless," she said. "And the worst of it is, I feel like apologising to her for things, nasty as she is. She's used, you see, to a big establishment."

"Well, why did you take her, then, Mama? I think myself she's useless. You should have got somebody with less pretensions."

"Yes, that's all very well, but it doesn't seem to occur to you, Clara, that a person who wasn't used to doing things well would be of no use to *me*. I couldn't possibly get on, for instance, with anyone like Lucie. This woman can dress my hair and she understands clothes, and she's a good masseuse—but when it comes to waiting on table and sweeping, I simply don't think she'll do it."

"Well, Mama, I don't think we need more than three women in this little house to look after us. Lucie is perfectly willing to do her share. And if Field can't bring in your meals and sweep out

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your room, I think you'd better get somebody else."

"Get somebody else! Up in this hole! How, pray, am I to get anyone else? Shall I take a peasant out of the fields to dress me? You talk like a fool, Clara."

Clara shrugged her shoulders and poured out the coffee. The barking of Fidelio was sharply audible above.

"Yes, that's another thing! Fidelio can't bear her. And, do you know, Clara, there is no place here where he can be dry-cleaned!"

Clara burst out laughing. "Then he must have a bath!" she cried heartlessly. "Now, Mama, you've got house-nerves. You come out into the woods, or take a carriage and we'll drive, about four, when it's cooler. It is a most romantic, charming place!"

"I cannot see it, Clara. And anyhow what's the use of romance when you're uncomfortable? I can't see how I'm to get on here. There is no place to put my clothes—no press, no closets, nothing but a dressing-room with hooks around! I could not sleep last night—fancy a wool mattress and a great sack of corn husks under it. Then

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if you take the *only* drawing-room for your piano, and I have to sit and listen to those scales and things, I shall go mad. Really, I shall."

Clara stopped eating, and contemplated her mother's down-cast head for some moments.

"Mama, were you never uncomfortable before—I mean, what you call uncomfortable, like this?" she enquired finally.

"No, child," said Mrs. Langham, pathetically. "I have always hated the country, and bare rough ways of living, and I've always gone to good hotels or lodgings, when I hadn't my own house. Really and truly, I never in my life had so comfortless a place as this."

Clara meditated.

"Well, I suppose it is hard on you," she admitted. "But then, you see, we can't help it. We really haven't got the money to live well just now."

Mrs. Langham made an impatient gesture.

"But this is absurd of you, Clara! As if we hadn't been hard up before! The bills are always paid somehow in the end, and those people are quite used to waiting for their money."

"But some of them *aren't* paid yet," said Clara

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in a low tone. "And what I can't stand is people dunning us. . . . If we live here this summer you can catch up, and be comfortable again next winter——"

"Well, I am willing to live here, though I don't believe I shall survive it. But not in this house, Clara! We might at least have a house with a garden and a sitting-room for me, and some good beds. I'm sure that isn't much to ask. And this place is really as damp as a tomb."

"It won't be damp when we get it sunned out once, at least these upper rooms won't be. And, Mama, it is as good as we can afford. You know I calculated very carefully, and my money will just cover expenses as it is."

"You are a good little bourgeoisie, Clara, but you have no imagination. How am I to get through the summer with no amusement, nothing? It's all very well for you, you have your everlasting music. But when I'm bored I'm afraid I am not a very cheerful companion—you may not be able to stand *me*."

"Well, I must manage to, somehow, I suppose," said Clara absently.

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She gazed out over her mother's head at the skyline of the wild hills, tufted thick with chestnut-trees, showing no sign of human domination except here and there the powdery smoke of a row of olives, or a winding hedge-row, the way to some hidden little town. The deep blue sky was soaked with warmth. The noise of the stream running in the ravine came up fresh and loud in its spring fulness. The peace and sweetness of this outlook were reflected in the girl's face; she seemed still in a kind of trance of enjoyment. Mrs. Langham gazed at her moodily, continued her meal in silence for some time, then resumed her theme.

“ You know, Clärchen, it really would have been so much more sensible for you to be with the Rasollis this summer. The Contessa would gladly have had you. And I could have gone with some of my friends——”

“ But, Mama,” said Clara rather impatiently, “ you know quite well that would not do. In the first place I could not wait about for the Rasollis, and I could not be at the hotel—I must have some place to work. And as for your going—why, you

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could not go travelling about without money, and you have not got any. You seem to forget that."

"I am not apt to forget it, with you to din it into my head every day," said Mrs. Langham sulkily.

She spread her hands out before her and looked at her rings—rings of diamonds, square emeralds and rubies and two great sullen sapphires.

"What it amounts to," she said after a moment, "is that you have arranged the summer entirely for your own convenience. This wretched house is merely a workshop for you. And I am simply a pendant, a kind of chaperone——!"

Clara shrugged her shoulders. "Show me some way that we can do better on less than a thousand francs a month," she said. Then having finished her coffee, she looked enquiringly at her mother and rose. "I must go and see if I can get that room cleared out. Lucie will help. I must get to work to-morrow."

Mrs. Langham got up and folded her morning-gown majestically about her.

"Will you please tell somebody to order a carriage for half-past three! I shall die if I

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don't get out of this tomb," she announced, and retired upstairs to her bedroom and a French novel.

Clara followed more slowly, and, avoiding the living-room, where she heard her mother sharply giving instructions about Fidelio's meal, she went out on the balcony that ran along the entire back of the house. There were two similar balconies below, on the two lower stories. Below the foundations of the house was a narrow terrace where there had once been a garden. The cracked dry basin of the fountain was still there, and the box-hedges, and a few flowering shrubs; but the grass grew long and thick about them all. Beyond this the hill plunged steeply down to the water-course fringed with trees; and almost on the other side of these trees the higher hills shot steeply up. There was room for but a foot-path and a long narrow field of grain, a garden-patch, a tiny grey house—the holding of some peasant-farmer. Two or three other little farms nestled in nooks of the hill-sides, in clearings of the great chestnut-forest that lay like a dense green mantle over all these slopes. But the whole effect was solitary, wild,

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fresh. All the civilisation of the place lay on the other side of the Piazza. Here was nothing more modern than the campanile of the grey village on the opposite hill peak: nothing more sophisticated than the blurred tablet let into the wall of the house, which stated that in fifteen hundred and seventy this edifice had been built by Luigi Momoli, for his soul's good.

Clara sat down in a garden-chair, one of their importations, and looked at the tablet, and at the hills and the sky. Meditatively she admitted the bareness of the place, the primitive way of living which their little casa implied. For herself she liked it deeply. She liked simplicity in living, bare floors, bare walls, few servants, meals of two courses; quiet, a rural solitude to wander in, space for brooding and for dreams. She hated hotels, upholstery, parade, noise, glitter and restlessness. She had never, so far in her life, been able to live as she liked, even as nearly as this. A long progression from one capital or fashionable watering-place to another, a perpetual change of base, a constant effort to live like richer people—these, by no will of her own, had been the outward con-

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ditions of her life. Her real life, almost all her enjoyment, had been entirely in herself. Her constant effort had been to withdraw herself from her material surroundings and to concentrate on her own individual interests. It was only by an intense concentration that she had accomplished what she had; only by a definite imposition of her own will that she had managed to get any possible conditions for her work. She had to deal with a stronger egotism than her own, but a weaker will; a will, in fact which crumpled at sight of resistance and became mere impotent discontent.

She wondered now, with sudden misgivings, if this present experiment of hers were to end in failure. If so what would be the result? She frowned, and her face took on a look of determination. Her mother must be made to stand it; there was nothing else to be done. She had made up her mind that no more debts should be incurred, by herself at least. Therefore they must live in a place that offered no temptations to extravagance. And she had been able now to force this because she held the purse-strings, her own income being paid over directly to herself.

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But she foresaw struggles; a good deal of discomfort for her mother and therefore for herself. That was in fact the best she could hope for, in the present situation. If they could get through the summer without an absolute crash, Clara felt that she might think herself fortunate.

## CHAPTER XIV

THEY drove out at four; for Mrs. Langham, absorbed in her novel, was late in dressing. The vehicle, an open cab with one horse, awaited them in the Piazza, and a little group of idle spectators had gathered there also to see what might be seen. The season had hardly begun yet for the Baths; these two *forestiere* were almost the first, and moreover they were unusually spectacular. With native susceptibility to beauty the country-people stared frankly at Mrs. Langham and her daughter, as the ladies got into their cab and were driven slowly through the arch.

“What a funny little place,” said Mrs. Langham patronisingly. “One would think they’d never seen a foreigner. I can’t say I like being down so near them as this. The hotel now—When do you say the Rasollis come?”

“Not till the middle of July,” Clara answered.

“Well, I hope those English friends of Eliza-

## *The Eternal Spring*

beth's will call on me. If they have a villa there will probably be something to be got out of them. Tell the man to drive through the town, will you? Let us see all there is to be seen."

With the brakes down the carriage proceeded on the winding road, which, though it tacked back and forth half a dozen times during the descent of the hill, was still a steep grade. After a moment's endurance of the screeching of the wheels Clara clapped both hands over her ears and cried, "I can't stand that noise—I'll meet you at the foot of the hill."

She jumped out of the carriage without waiting for it to stop, and took the footpath, which made short-cuts connecting the loops of the road. She had not dressed for parade. Her white dress was short and plain, she wore a wide-brimmed flapping hat; her whole appearance was of freshness, simplicity and ease. She moved with more vigour in this clearer air. There was something almost athletic about her long light stride as she half-ran down the path. She wore heelless white shoes, and her feet touched the earth firmly and with an elastic spring that sent the soft colour again into

## *The Eternal Spring*

her face. She glanced from side to side as she went, with pleasure in the charm of the place. This hill-side had not the remote and lonely look of the view from her balcony; it was civilised, cultivated. It had hedges of box, clumps of wonderful cypresses, a villa-gate or two overgrown with flowers, and farther down small houses occupied by the townspeople. From it one looked down into the larger valley where the green river ran and the houses of the town clustered about the bridge. At the foot of the hill the road passed between two rows of buildings into the village square. Here Clara got into the carriage again.

The square was surrounded by low shops, except one side, where the river ran beneath a wall shaded by plane-trees. Next to this wall was the *caffè*, before which were set out a number of little tables. The place was pleasantly full of people, sitting and sipping their vermouth and water, lounging round the shop-fronts, leaning on the wall, enjoying the cool of the day.

“I’d like to stop and have an ice there,” said Clara suddenly.

“Mercy, no, child, not there, among all those

## *The Eternal Spring*

people! What ideas you have! We'll get some tea at the hotel."

The cab rolled on through the square, attracting some little attention in its passage, and out by the single street of the village, which prolonged itself into the country road; this again merging into the single street of the farther and larger town. The road was a little dusty and the sun struck on it now and then. Mrs. Langham shifted her parasol.

"You are getting terribly freckled, Clara," she observed. "Your nose and the top of your cheeks are quite covered. Why won't you wear a veil, or at least not go about bare-headed like a contadina?"

"I don't mind freckles, Mama," Clara said. "And anyhow there is no one here to see me."

"Well, you never know when there may be."

Clara did not answer, but sat tranquilly in her corner of the seat and watched the gentle panorama of the roadside—wall, terrace, embowered villa, glimpses of the branching river. Her look of brooding enjoyment was still there; she seemed to have an inward source of pleasure which now and then expressed itself in an abstracted smile.

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“What are you smiling at?” finally enquired Mrs. Langham after an interval of silence. “I think if you have any cheerful thoughts you might share them!”

“Not thoughts exactly,” said Clara. “I wasn’t thinking . . . It’s so delicious—the air and all this greenness, and the quiet. I don’t know why it gives me so much pleasure, but it does.”

“Nonsense. I don’t believe you were smiling at that. It was something more definite. You are so secretive, Clara! I never know what you are thinking. I hardly know what you are doing any more. You might talk more frankly to me—about Morelli, for instance. I’m glad you did break off with him, for I think you can do better, but I don’t yet understand just why you did.”

Clara ceased to smile.

“I can’t tell you any more about it,” she said quickly. “It was just impossible, that’s all. I don’t want to talk about it, Mama.”

“No, I know you don’t want to talk about any of your own affairs—to me, at least. You are getting more and more to be absolutely silent,

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Clara. It's a frightful habit. You ought to realise it, and try to break yourself of it—if you expect to live with other people. I don't think you know what an effect it has on me, for instance. You go about wrapped up in yourself like a mummy. I am used to people who make themselves a little more agreeable. And if you and I are to be shut up together for months, you must try to do so."

Clara was quite clouded now.

"I see what you mean," she said after a pause. "But I don't know whether I can do it. I hope to do a lot of work this summer; and then I don't seem to have much energy left to talk. I'd rather just roam about in the woods and be quiet."

"Exactly. But I hope you see that's a perfectly selfish way of living—and moreover it's bad for you too. What's the use of all this 'work'? You are not strong enough to carry it out and make a real success of it. You would do much better to marry, while you are young and pretty."

There was another pause, as after each of these speeches of Mrs. Langham; calm, incisive, clear, as they were. Then Clara asked:

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“ But what would you do, Mama, if I should? ”

Mrs. Langham laughed slightly.

“ It would make no great difference to me, child. I can't tell you just what I would do, but on the whole I should be quite as comfortable. You and I never were especially congenial, you know. And since you have grown up you have shut yourself off more and more from me. You don't like my friends and I don't like yours. Living together is just a wretched kind of compromise, and makes neither of us happy. Of course I should want to see you often, if you were married. We should get on very well, I'm sure, if we weren't tied to one another.”

Clara seemed to meditate on this; nervously clasping and unclasping her hands in her lap.

“ But I can't see how you could live all alone,” she said finally. “ You seem so bored most of the time. And yet when you have the kind of people you like, you quarrel with them, you know you do. There were the Mayhews in London, and Madame Marum——”

Mrs. Langham moved impatiently.

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“Never mind them! There are plenty of others. I don’t expect to spend my lifetime with any of them, anyhow. And if I often seem bored, it’s just because I’m tied down so much. You don’t realise it, but I have made a great many sacrifices for you, Clara.”

There was a long silence after that. Clara looked vaguely out of her side of the carriage, at the low scattered modern buildings of the town through which they were now passing—the library, the English church, the Casino, the little shops—a town made for visitors. They reached the hotel, and alighted for tea. They had the garden to themselves—a garden with a tennis-court and a perfectly spick-and-span look—and while they were waiting Mrs. Langham walked about inspecting the place.

“We should have done infinitely better to come down here,” she said with decision as she came back and sat down. “This at least is partly civilised.”

Clara looked up absently.

“Have you really made many sacrifices for me?” she asked.

“Are you still thinking about that? . . .

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Why, yes I have, Clara. Take this present arrangement of ours, for instance. You know I protested against it all along."

"Yes, but something like this was necessary just now. But it seems to me that we have generally gone to the places you wanted——"

"No, I don't think so. We have always had to think of your music, and go to this place and that for you to study. London, for instance,—you know I hate London. And Vienna—we lived there two years. I'm not complaining about that—of course it was my business to look after you. But I'm only saying that I don't want to go on doing it perpetually."

"And I thought I was looking after you!" cried Clara. "You know I did, too—I always did the housekeeping and saw to the bills, and arranged about travelling and all that! You are quite helpless, Mama! I don't believe you could get on alone—you don't know what it would be!"

Mrs. Langham shook her head wearily.

"I know quite well. I did it all when you were little. . . . Don't talk about it any more. I

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only wanted to get out of your head the idea that I can't exist without you. By all means you should marry, Clara, if you can ever make up your mind to it. And remember that it gets more difficult to make up your mind each year."

The tea came at this point—very English tea and muffins. When the waiter had gone and Clara had poured the tea she said suddenly:

"Mr. Carleton will come up here soon."

"Will he? What has he to do with it?"

"A great deal—perhaps. I do think I might marry him."

"You might if you wished to, I suppose. But I did not know you had thought of it."

"Yes, I have. I think perhaps I should like to marry him."

"Do you really?" Mrs. Langham drank her tea slowly and pushed the cup over to be refilled. "Well, I don't pretend to advise you, Clara. You have made it very clear for some time past that you wanted no advice from me. But I'm glad you have told me this. It makes a difference, of course, about his coming. . . . It is not exactly a brilliant match."

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“No, it is not brilliant. I don't think I care about brilliance.”

“You have forgotten the sugar. . . . What do you care about, then, Clara? What do you see in this particular man, for instance?”

“I don't know that I can tell exactly. But I like him. He understands things.”

“Oh, he's intelligent enough. And what is more, he has a good deal of force, I think—more than he seems to care about showing. He might do very well for you, I think. He does not seem to want to work, but he can evidently when he wants to. I daresay you might be rich after all, if you wanted it.”

Clara said no more, but drank her tea, looking rather melancholy.

“But don't,” Mrs. Langham went on with more energy, “let it drag along, as you did with Morelli. It's very hard on the man, and it's hard on you too, Clara. I believe his being in London with us was one thing that made you break down. You take things too emotionally. If you could make up your mind quickly it would be far better. . . . About this Mr. Carleton—I like him

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too, though he has not shown any special interest in having me like him. You made it too clear, I suppose, that my influence didn't count much, one way or the other. But I think he's the sort of man who doesn't go dancing about after women, anyhow. He's more like an Englishman than an American. He has more of their quietness. And that's a good thing for a woman. I don't believe he'd spoil you, as most Americans do their wives—only you're rather spoiled already, you know, Clara. All your whims, and moods and caprices. . . .” Mrs. Langham began to feed Fidelio with bits of muffin and lost her theme. “Poor Fiddle! Poor disreputable doggy! Couldn't get himself cleaned decently in this horrid place! . . . What was I saying, Clara?”

“I—I don't quite know, Mama,” said Clara apologetically.

“Well, what are you dreaming about? I was talking of you . . . I sha'n't take your Mr. Carleton seriously as yet, however. You certainly do not know your own mind particularly well. Only try to be a little careful, Clara. Don't rush along with your eyes shut. Don't roam about

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with him at night again. You may despise conventions, but they are useful things. You never know when you may need them. At any rate you ought to be very sure of yourself before you disregard them."

Mrs. Langham finished her maternal lecture in a calm semi-detached manner, and tossed another bit of muffin to Fidelio. Clara gazed away from her into the depths of a clump of laurels; turning her head so that the drooping hat-brim hid her whole face, as though she were conscious of its expression and the necessity for hiding it. It was a frankly significant expression, one to be easily read; it meant passionate weariness, bitterness, revolt. After a moment the girl dropped her head on her arm, that rested on the back of the seat. The shielding brim left visible only the knot of black hair against the white neck, and a flushed cheek.

Mrs. Langham looked at her daughter with something like the same weariness, but with exasperation as the most passionate element of feeling. She went on slowly feeding the dog until the muffin was entirely consumed. Then she said, drawing on her pearl-coloured gloves:

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“Well, I suppose we may as well go on.”

Clara rose at once. She paid the waiter and followed her mother out to the carriage. Mrs. Langham suddenly recollected a number of things she wanted in the town: some French papers, which were not obtainable, some violet-water for her bath, some tulle. Then they went to the library, where to her disgust she found nothing but musty books, dating from the middle of the century, when the place was in its prime.

“Only six o'clock!” she exclaimed when all the errands she could think of were done “Two hours to get through before dinner! We must drive farther on.”

Accordingly they drove on through the town, across another bridge, along the highroad which ran by the river's edge, smooth, broad, bordered by poplars whose leaves were turning and flashing their white under-sides in the breeze. They passed some workmen, who had just finished their day's task of breaking stones for the repair of the road. They passed a flock of goats with tinkling bells driven by a bare-headed, bare-footed girl in a crimson dress; then an old mill on the bank, and a

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dam of rough stones over which the water poured in a wonderful emerald-green fall. The river-bed was full of stones and the water bubbled and foamed against them. In the chestnut-wood that rose from the roadside, undulating over the hillslopes, the wind played musically. Each hill of the numbers fading into blue distance had its little grey-brown town, each town its square campanile, from which now the bells were ringing, chiming to one another across the narrow valleys; a sweet peaceful chorus. The flavour of wood-smoke in the air had a homely sweetness too; it belonged to the evening calm, the return of the people to their evening meal, from the road, the fields, the mill and factory.

The two women in the carriage were silent for a long time. Mrs. Langham retired behind the folds of her veil. Clara watched the river, breathed the deep sweetness of the air, saw the purple shadows gather over the hillsides, heard the song of the bells, with a pleasure of the senses that was half pain. When the pain got uppermost her eyes would fill with tears; tears that she got rid of without giving any sign.

## CHAPTER XV

CARLETON came to Bagni leisurely, stopping at Pisa and at Lucca, and walking the sixteen miles from Lucca on, between ten o'clock and seven of a warm June day. It was uphill all the way, and the roads were dusty; so that in spite of taking it slowly, long before he came to his journey's end he was conscious of a salutary fatigue. He meant to get back into walking form again as speedily as might be. A month's physical indolence had satisfied him in that way. It had been like a long calm voyage in tropical seas. But the voyage must come to an end, and what he looked to now required some effort. Happily effort was no longer a terror to him. He could even foresee the time when he should like it again for its own sake.

He had been in a solitary mood since leaving La Fontanella. A mood to enjoy particularly the quiet country he was passing through, the antique

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charm of its cities, its rural freshness, which somehow suggested ever the ancient model. In Pisa he lingered some days. He spent two long pensive afternoons in the sun-lit cloisters of the Campo Santo, meditating on the old pavement of grave-stones and the quaint frescoes; meditations strangely inspired by the echoing organ-phrases of "Urn-Burial," and illumined by the reconciling beauty of the sarcophagi carved with gay creatures of the sea and forest; and by the grace of the Greek urn, with its light twining procession of figures, which might almost have been Keats' original.

The sweet spirit of these old memorials of death sent him forth cheerful upon the road. There in the humble life of the fields and wayside the forms of things were still cheerful and even gay, though their antiquity cast always the shadow of immemorial time, even as the shadows of the cloister had lain on the sunny grass of the Holy Field. Thus the gayest note of all, the looping of the grapevines from tree to tree all along the road and up the slopes, suggesting a perpetual festival of wine and rejoicing, suggesting the fruity Della

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Robbia garlands—this note too had the tone of the ages, echoing from the pages of Montaigne and who knew how much earlier? For centuries these people had been looping their vines thus, tilling the same fields in the same ways, living in the same groups of weathered houses whose inaccessibility spoke of the age of war and brigandage, being gathered themselves finally into some humbler Holy Field of the myriads that dotted the hills. From beholding them and their lives *sub specie aeternitatis*, or at least merged in the surrounding beauty of the earth, Carleton reached the point of beholding himself and his own life in the same fashion. And this was the point he desired to reach; to this his mood had been tending, ever since, restless and disturbed, he had left La Fontanella.

A certain calm and possession of himself had always been a necessity of being to him. He could not bear to be thrown off his balance for long at a time; nor to have confusion and uncertainty within, so that his feeling must be narrowly personal. He was single-hearted. One emotion, with the depth of his natural intensity and con-

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centration, could suffice for him; and, constantly fulfilled and satisfied, leave him philosophically free. But it must be deep and deeply fulfilled! It was the impossibility of this with Elizabeth that had made their break inevitable. It was the possibility which he instinctively felt in Clara that had drawn him to her.

Thinking of her was a joy, but a troubled joy. No amount of looking at his feeling for her *sub specie aeternitatis* could make it as yet purely serene. But it was striving toward purity, toward serenity—as an intermediate stage, toward satisfaction. The Greek poet's image of earthly love recurred to him as truth: In the beginning mankind were created complete in themselves. But the gods perceived that with this completeness man would be too strong, and they clove him in twain; and ever since the two halves of each individual have gone about the world seeking one another. When by chance they find one another and are united again they become strong enough to defy the gods!

. . . . .  
The last day of his journey was one of pure

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happiness. As he began the long ascent from Lucca his burden of half-melancholy thought slipped from him and the Delectable Mountains rose before him. Partly it was the physical stimulus that lightened his spirits, and vague memories of his long ramblings of earlier years, in Burgundy, the Black Forest, the Swiss uplands. But it was the thought that he might see Clara that night—or at least in the morning—that made the world a pleasant place. With his mind full of her he saw more keenly the beauty of the country that brought him to her. This freshness of the deep chestnut-forest, spreading into every wrinkle of the hills, clear of underbrush, floored with flowery turf and rock, pierced by innumerable singing streams and shadowy paths; the ring of great mountains climbing higher and higher toward the north; the air, sweet, poignant, lulling, delicious; the sky blue as the Madonna's robe, with cloudlets like crowds of *putti*: all this luring and youthful charm seemed to him just the setting for her, for the beautiful girl who had promised—wasn't it a promise?—to love him.

He reached the hotel on the hill-top, passing

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through the Piazza, about seven; tired, dusty, but still happy. A bath and change of dress—his baggage had been sent on ahead—and a dinner at the table d'hôte in company with some newly arrived and agreeable English people, mellowed and deepened his content, which yet was not content, for he was by no means minded to stay where he was. He took coffee with the English family in the billiard-room, which with the dining-room made a sort of pavilion separate from the main building and more modern; and played at billiards afterwards, winning with an ease to which he was used. All this time he was debating whether he might go to see Clara that evening. He knew now where she lived. The English lady, Mrs. Mallot, had spoken to him about the Langhams, as "those two wonderful Americans"; and finding he knew them, had taken him out on the terrace and pointed out the house, just visible from the top of the long flight of steps. He liked Mrs. Mallot at sight; her quiet unemphatic speech and manner, her charming speech, her vitality and friendliness. She looked about forty, and told him she was a grandmother. With her were her

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two brothers, ruddy, sound-looking men, who bore their age with pleasant ease.

Carleton finally strolled out and down the steps into the Piazza. It was the dark of the moon—that moon so wonderful on the heights above La Fontanella—but the sky was amazingly full of stars. The houses round the Piazza seemed to have gone to bed. The wine-shop was closed. Only a gleam showed here and there behind a shutter. Some of these gleams came from the windows of Clara's house. Carleton wandered up and down the Piazza with his cigar, looking at the chinks of light. It occurred to him to send in a note to ask if he might be received, late as it was; but perhaps she would think it indecent precipitation. He had promised in effect not to bother her. He could not risk boring her by appearing at the wrong time.

While he lingered and looked Clara's piano broke out brilliantly—the Chopin Impromptu in A. The glittering music seemed to his enchanted ear to be gaily played, in lightness of heart. But it ended abruptly and there was no more, though he stayed an hour longer.

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In the morning he heard the piano again. For two hours she worked, phrase by phrase, over a Chopin concerto; and at the end she played some strange music, full of far-reaching chords and Oriental harmonies. The patient man spent his morning thus within earshot and eyeshot of the house, which kept its shutters obstinately closed, presenting a blank mysterious front and suggesting an eager interesting life within. Finally, toward noon, Carleton's watch was rewarded. He was sitting on the bench under the plane-trees, talking to the keeper of the wine-shop, when the door of the house opened and Clara came out, in her short walking-dress and broad hat, followed by Fidelio. She turned toward the road leading into the chestnut-forest, and Carleton overtook her in the middle of the Piazza. Her greeting of him was all he had hoped for. She was startled, as he took her unawares, but her perturbation was of good omen. She blushed as though the hot sunlight had touched her cheeks; the colour and expression of her face wavered, as though seen through a column of shimmering air. That was for a moment only.

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“You mustn’t stand in the sun,” Carleton said.  
“May I walk on with you?”

“I was going into the wood. Fidelio has to have an outing before his dinner—and I too.”

They went on together.

“You’ve been at work this morning. I heard you.”

“Yes. . . . Mama says my playing gets on Fidelio’s nerves—she declares that he especially hates Chopin! I hope you weren’t afflicted long?”

“Oh, I’ve been about here all the morning. Last night too, I heard you playing. I didn’t dare go up and knock.”

“You came last night? Why didn’t you come in? Mama will weep for joy when she knows you are here. What do you think of the place?”

“I think it is heavenly. And you—do you like it?”

“I love it—it is so fresh and quiet. But Mama is unutterably bored. There she is on the balcony, see?”

The winding road had brought them in sight of the back of the casa. There on the upper balcony, under a gay awning, in a reclining chair, Mrs.

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Langham was visible. She was clad in a voluminous white negligé, and was reading something in yellow covers.

“Poor Mama! She is reduced to reading novels half the time. There are no people yet, to speak of. I hope you will go and talk to her soon.”

“Gladly,” said Carleton.

Gladly would he have done anything she suggested, in that soft, quick, hesitating voice, the words coming out with a little rush, then a half-breathless pause. Her way of speaking seemed to him unutterably charming. Never had she seemed so beautiful as now. Her colour was bright and less transient; it seemed to have been fixed by the sun. She was, in fact, a little burned, a little freckled. She looked stronger and, in her short dress, more girlish. There were some crimson poppies on her hat, and a little bunch of them drooped at the back against her black hair. She had a crimson belt, to match. As she walked by his side she seemed to him like a little girl, less tall than he remembered her. Then he saw that her white shoes were without heels, that this most adorable height was her own!

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He absorbed every detail of her appearance in those first few moments of delighted vision. Her white blouse was open a little at the neck. She wore a chain of red coral and seed-pearls. Her eyes, when she looked up, were more green than he had ever seen them—definitely, wonderfully green under their black lashes. A marvellous bit of colour and life she was! The determination to appropriate her grew stronger in him each moment.

She had a dog-whip with a clasp at the end in her hand, and showed it to Carleton with a smile.

“I have to fasten Fidelio up occasionally. He is fearfully quarrelsome, and he seems to think the dogs about here are *canaille*, hardly fit to live. He nearly killed one the other day.”

“He looks fearfully opinionated,” said Carleton.

“He is as proud as Lucifer!”

“An aristocrat in the false sense. He must be an uncomfortable person to go about with.”

“Oh, he is! Almost as bad as an Englishman travelling. He really behaves like a beast if his comfort is interfered with.”

They were out of sight of the houses by now,

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and the cool shade of the wood enveloped them. The road was checkered with bits of sunlight, but on either side the trees stood so thick as to make almost unbroken shadow. On one side the slope was downward, on the other up, up as far as the eyes could pierce; and the road, too, climbed by a slow grade, with many windings. Then it dipped again suddenly and brought them, at the head of the ravine, to a mill, with huge, dripping water-wheel, and the rush of the stream down on the rocks. Meantime they went on talking lightly, quickly, with the ease that pleasure in one another gives. Clara wanted to hear the details of his journey—at least, she led him to talk about them and then about his earlier European experiences. And here they found they could compare impressions of many places and things, Clara having been so much a nomad. Perhaps it did not much matter what they talked about, since all these discoveries of similarities of taste and intellectual sympathies, or of equally enchanting differences, were a foregone conclusion; given the original impulse toward one another, the original impression, too strong to be disturbed by any adverse

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discovery. Enough that they found they liked the same things—Nature, simple living, primitive art, modern music, and, especially, Life!

On that first walk they became sure of this much—and perhaps of much more that was unexpressed. Then Clara had to hurry back for luncheon with her mother. She asked Carleton to come to tea at half-past four, after which they would make some sort of excursion—driving, probably. He lingered a moment at her door, deeply reluctant to leave her. His fascinated gaze had to have some excuse.

“You’re looking so well—and happy! Is that—the happiness—only a mood, too?”

“Who knows? I am always hoping it will last. It’s like all the Della Robbia experiments—if I only *could* get the right glaze!——”

She laughed, and withdrew behind the shuttered door.

“Till half-past four, then,” cried Carleton, and sighing deep and loverlike, he betook himself up to the hotel.

## CHAPTER XVI

**N**OW began for Carleton a brief season of idyllic charm. Tacitly whatever there was of doubt, perplexity and shadow in his relation to Clara was put aside. She made him welcome. She was all charm and sweetness. She was light-hearted as he had never before seen her; she sang and laughed, as they made their daily excursions in the forest.

It was understood that they spent their days together, after Clara had got through her morning's work. But it was also understood that they could not go about alone. On carriage excursions Mrs. Langham chaperoned them. But they both preferred walking, and Mrs. Langham would not walk. In this emergency Carleton managed to enlist Mrs. Mallot on his side. With a love of exercise and a wiry incapacity for fatigue this lady combined a generous interest in her fellowmen and a passion for old furniture. All these things joined

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to make her a willing companion to Carleton and Clara. For their long walks and climbs always had for objective some little town, where there was almost always a *casa mobiliata* in which could be found an inlaid table, or a chair, or bit of embroidery that pleased Mrs. Mallot's eye. Then, while she made her bargain, the other two could talk, sitting, perhaps, in the dim little church, or awaiting her before the tiny *caffè* where the invariable vermouth, and nothing else, was to be obtained. She always gave them a generous allowance of time; and they had other chances along the road while she pretended to botanise. Carleton had taken her into his confidence, and she warmed his heart by her sincere enthusiasm for Clara.

Her two brothers were often of the party. They were leisurely, quiet men, with a kind of ripe bloom of aspect and manner, an eminently social cheerfulness. On more intimate acquaintance they disclosed an astonishing variety of experience. The elder was a Catholic, and had been a Trappist monk in Spain; the younger a Methodist missionary in China. Mrs. Mallot had spent her girlhood in the East, and had lived for months at a time in

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a harem, the guest of one of the princesses. She now had a number of children, nearly all married and settled. Carleton's liking for her grew steadily, and she encouraged him to talk to her about Clara on the occasions when Mrs. Langham or someone else carried the girl off.

These occasions, at first rare, became increasingly frequent. The English friends of Elizabeth—a sharp-nosed dowager, Lady Mervine, who did not make calls, and Sir Anthony, her son—began inviting the Langhams to tennis and tea. In this way they met the little world of villa people; and some of these began to haunt the house, notably a handsome youth of twenty-two, Marchese Malvini, of a striking and rather brutal Neapolitan type. The hotels were filling up. A dance and a concert were given at the Casino down in the town. Mrs. Langham was rather strenuous in amusing herself, and Clara was more and more engaged.

Carleton became conscious that he was capable of jealousy. The elder brother of Mrs. Mallot remarked to him one day, *à propos* of nothing in particular, that he could not see how anyone ventured to marry American girls, since, with all their

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charm, they had so much individuality. Carleton wondered if he had thought of marrying Clara!

He became violently jealous of Sir Anthony, a stout and eminently placid man, because he danced (abominably) with Clara some three or four times in an evening. He watched with keen suspicion young Malvini's incessant visits, till it dawned on him that Malvini was attracted more by Mrs. Langham than by Clara.

He was aware that an irrational amount of emotion went into these jealousies; and when Clara was with him he was still quite happy and almost at peace. She seemed happy to be with him. She enjoyed their exploration of the forest-depths and the remote villages where the summer-people never penetrated, infinitely more than the small social activities of these people. Sometimes he visited her at the house. They sat on the balcony and he read Wordsworth and Heine to her; or she played for him, and sometimes sang, Schumann-Heine and Grieg, or perhaps something she had set herself. Her music was a most poignant pleasure to him: especially he loved her singing, and sitting

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where he could see her face, which was then more than ever the face of a Madonna, he felt himself assailed on all sides by her varied charm, and sinking fathoms deep in love.

They had wonderful days, when piercing the ring of hills immediately surrounding them, they visited some less primitive, larger, but still unfrequented town, where a faded gilded picture, Scuola di Giotto, or Byzantine carvings from the dawn of art, illumined the silent churches. Days of pure gold these were, with the fresh beauty of the flowery country, the delicious air; with pleasant, easy talk by the way, or silence, and a rural meal of bread, cheese, fruit and wine to break the journey; with the gaiety and the deep, sweet disquiet of two human creatures drawing nearer and nearer to one another.

Carleton's heart leaped to see how she bloomed in his companionship. She looked another creature from the fragile girl of La Fontanella. She seemed strong in body and soul. She could walk easily six and seven miles a day, climbing over rough paths; and for long after his arrival there was not a sign of her former melancholy moodi-

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ness. She seemed even to have shaken off the oppression of her mother's personality.

Carleton could not but see, however, that if she did this it was by an effort; the depressing influence of that personality remained, for the time in the background, but perpetually trying to show itself. Seeing Mrs. Langham daily, as he now did, he rapidly came to consider her as a kind of miasmatic fog, hanging about some dark slough and sullenly threatening disaster. She began to loom portentous in his imagination. The perception of her colossal selfishness and hardness grew upon him. The sight of her carefully tended beauty became hateful to him. She seemed ridiculous, but also terrible. He could never be long in her company without seeing in her the woman whose folly had cost two men's lives. Instead of being crushed or even softened by that tragedy, she had been hardened by it in her self-indulgence and narrow egotism. Apparently she had forgotten all about it; at any rate, she wished to forget it, or to have it forgotten. A superior dramatic sense or cleverness, Carleton reflected, would have led her to recognise and use it. She might have wrapped

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herself in it, as in a sombre pall, magnificently. She might have been effective as the wronged woman, the real victim of the tragedy. But cleverness seemed as remote from her as any kind of largeness. Therefore, in trying to ignore her past she had only fixed attention on it, and made herself appear what she insisted she was not. Therefore, she was not effective, except as a scourge to those connected with her. There was no real force behind her ruthless self-assertion. Her beauty all her life long, he felt, had been an empty, and so a cheap, lure. But it had been a power—her only power—and now it was all she had left; and it, too, was failing her—slowly, perhaps, but with a dreadful sureness. Augusta was growing stout. And sometimes, taken unawares, as the informality of their present domestic arrangements allowed, she appeared to Carleton imperfectly got up. Then she appeared merely a dreadful old woman.

He tried to see her good points; her frankness, lack of sentimentality, and her entire willingness to live and let live. But even these he could not see except as the results of her egotism and want of imagination. Gradually he was coming to detest

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her. And yet she was the mother of Clara; and constantly, in spite of himself, he was watching for some point of resemblance between them. He could not find any, except a very slight physical likeness; but the search had a fearful fascination. He had always disliked to see a girl handicapped by the constant presence of even the best of mothers, since the future thus in a measure indicated for her could almost never be anything but a handicap. But in this instance his revolt was profound. He kept assuring himself that Clara did not and never could really resemble her mother, even physically. Mrs. Langham was a big woman and phlegmatic; Clara was small-boned, delicate, nervous. Mentally, temperamentally, they were opposite as the poles. But this handicap of Clara's acted in curious fashion—actually as a spur to his ardour. He felt a passionate pity for her, a passionate desire to make up to her for what had been unfortunate in her life. More and more he felt that she, with any drawback she might have, with any danger even in herself, was a thousand times dearer and more to be desired than he had ever thought any woman could be. He was willing to

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take any risks with her and for her. Let her only be his, and whatever the past or the future should threaten them with should be boldly faced.

Meantime, he saw that he stood in their household as a recognised suitor of Clara. He was accepted on that plane without any words about it. Mrs. Langham rather ostentatiously kept away from the usual maternal attitude. She showed no solicitude, no extraordinary interest in him. She had, indeed, the entirely detached attitude that might have been hers toward the recognised lover of some other woman. But she took him for granted—his constant presence and companionship with Clara; and Clara also took these for granted. He felt that something must have been said about him between them, though their curious relation, or lack of relation, made him uncertain of the extent of confidence Clara could give to her mother. There could, of course, be no tender confidence between them. There was no love between them. That was clearly obvious. Between them was a great gulf fixed. They were spiritually like two strangers, thrown by accident into a proximity equally painful to both.

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Their disagreements in domestic life Clara quite frankly revealed to Carleton. She took them, however, lightly and philosophically. She told him about her housekeeping, which, on the whole, she enjoyed. Troubles with the cook and tradesmen, and the discomforts of "Mama" and Fidelity and the English maid, who finally gave warning, she depicted with humour. He saw that she could take small worries easily, and could free herself from their atmosphere by going to work at her music, or getting out with him into the woods, where always she seemed happy and at peace.

He got her to join the tennis-club at the lower town, and to play with him, though she played very badly. She protested that the Italian air, even in these hills, was not favourable to anything so violent, and pronounced in favour of croquet, at which she was an expert. But Carleton insisted on the tennis, and she gracefully yielded. Her sweetness was really a miracle to him. He had not thought, when they parted at La Fontanella, that he could so easily have gained so much ground with her. It almost seemed that some force must have been working for him in his absence. For in

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these weeks since his arrival at Bagni he had had no reason to think that first impression of her a mistaken one. There had been some change in her, and that change was favourable to him.

Thus he was happy—very, very happy—in spite of occasional thorns. He knew that some time soon he should tell her that he loved her. And now he felt deeply sure of her. It was not a confidence that was in any way liable to be expressed—it lay too deep for that, in a kind of instinct—and, indeed, he sometimes doubted superficially, as he was superficially jealous. But the depths of his feeling were not stirred as yet by anything but his love.

Deep as this lay the source of his happiness and well-being. It was no wonder that in this atmosphere, physical and moral, his nervous health came back. He began to feel that he never had been ill, tired, spent. Outdoor life and happiness—his prescription for Clara—were giving him back the buoyancy of youth. He ate and slept wonderfully. Sometimes he went off on long tramps alone; and in the solitude of the forest the impulse came on him to sing, to shout, to throw himself on the moss

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and roll, for sheer vigour of spirits. It was a renaissance of his joy in life; and life seemed to him now infinitely good, infinitely rich; its troubles and griefs but like foam on the surface of a full, pouring tide.

He had almost forgotten Florence, Elizabeth, America, all outside this little spot of earth that held his delight. Then, one day, coming back alone from a twenty-mile walk, he found at the hotel some American letters, forwarded from Florence. With an unpleasant shock he recognised on one the name and handwriting of Crittenden, the specialist in nervous diseases, to whom he had written weeks ago from La Fontanella. He remembered at once the text of his own letters, and realised that this reply would be an expert opinion on Clara's chances of inheriting insanity. The shadow that had been put far from him for these weeks came down black and frightful. His hands actually trembled as he held the letter.

He put it down deliberately, and bathed and dressed for dinner. And meantime he reassured himself thus: Crittenden had had from him only

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a layman's account of the case, and not a full account, either, of course. Therefore, he could not give a final or even a very definite opinion. And with his habitual caution, it was more than likely, after all, that he would give no opinion. Fortified by this conclusion, Carleton read the letter.

Crittenden began with some friendly comment on Carleton and Italy, and proceeded thus:

“The heredity of insanity is a slippery subject, and in all likelihood you will not be much enlightened by the following well-meant remarks: More and more we are limiting heredity to purely somatic elements. Matters of function, of emotion, of changing circumstance, of stress and strain, of nutrition, of training, do not come under this head, and therefore are foreign. Characteristics that are evolved and controlled by these last-named factors are temporary, and at most point to a predisposition. Indeed, a large part of what is commonly called heredity is no more than predisposition working in a favourable environment. In the case of your girl there is no necessary taint of

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insanity at all. The father may or may not have committed murder. If he did and for the reason of a wife's infidelity, he should be regarded as the victim of a temporary aberration or excitement produced in part by a temporary deviation from his normal good health and in part by the ancient prejudices of society, which considers such a form of violence as salving the murderer's 'honour.' It is an analogue to the honour-saving virtue of a duel. And there is just as much insanity in a duel as in such a murder.

“The girl, as you say, has attacks of melancholia; also, if you didn't say it, she suffers from neurasthenia. She was almost certainly picked out for such a condition. She was sensitive, emotional, led a sedentary life, doubtless was irregular in her habits, did little physical work. Such people need much less than a murder in the family to fit them for the Simple Life House. If they haven't a reason, they'll develop enough industry to make one. Moreover, their abnormality frequently develops a wondrous love for self-pity, for the pity of others; and under stress of this emotion will suffer all sorts of self-inflicted miseries. As a rule,

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your girl should come under this caption. When she refused marriage, if she loved the man, she was not really influenced by altruistic ideas; she was merely playing a star part. This interpretation may not please you, but it is pretty apt to be true. If the silly thing would only marry the right sort of male animal, who would know how to pet her with one hand and slap her with the other; if she were not so rich as to suffer from ingrowing money; if she had two to four babies whom she was to care for with her own white hands; if she developed regular habits of work and play—of a surety she would not be troubled with melancholia and maunderings about such a trifle as having a murderer in the family.

“However, if the father of your fool girl had the real thing in homicidal mania, founded upon a real nervous lesion, there would doubtless have been an hereditary taint, a possible septic sickness or injury, and a train of well-defined symptoms, with a central fact of clearly expressed delusion of persecution. And in that case there would be a possibility of the inheritance descending in the direct line, or perhaps skipping one generation and

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reappearing in the next. But this possibility constitutes no more of a chance than the present state of the universe justifies one in taking . . . .”

That was the substance of the letter as it bore on Clara. The effect of it on Carleton was tremendously disturbing. Not that it affected in the least his position toward Clara or his feeling for her. Indeed, the weight of Crittenden's judgment was on his side—in favour of his own instinctive optimism. But it stirred the whole thing up again, when he had almost succeeded in feeling that it had no real importance, no necessary bearing on his relation to Clara. And that last paragraph, that proviso, that *possibility*, made it wretchedly plain that it was important, that it must be taken into account.

It amounted to this: If Charles Langham had had “the real thing in homicidal mania,” his daughter was liable to a fate much worse than immediate death. And who was to say whether or not he had had the real thing? He had been fifteen years in his grave. There was but one witness to his real condition at hand; and it was to her interest to make out that he had been a maniac, or at

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least to becloud the whole matter. This was what she had done, and doubtless would continue to do.

And Clara, then, must continue to live as she had lived, with that possibility hanging over her?

If she must, at least he would share it with her. He would protect her as far as possible, stand between her and that fear if he could. He would marry her as soon as possible. And if it came to the worst, they could die together.

He went out of the hotel, forgetting his fatigue and his dinner, and rushed down the hill. He never knew exactly where he wandered that night; but he ended up at the little *caffè* by the river's edge some hours later. He persuaded them to give him some food, and sat there in the solitary square, eating and listening to the rush of the river, too tired now to think any more.

## CHAPTER XVII

**E**ARLY the next morning he went down and asked for Clara. Lucie told him that she had gone into the wood with Fidelio; and he followed her, welcoming this piece of good fortune. It had been arranged that they were to walk that afternoon, with Mrs. Mallot, to a place deep in the hills, a town which they had not yet visited; but Carleton had no mind to wait till the afternoon. He went slowly along the road, glancing from side to side through the trees; but he might, after all, have missed her if it had not been for Fidelio. That superior animal was presently to be observed, rooting delicately in the fallen leaves and spines of last year's chestnut-burrs, at the base of a flat rock. He barked as Carleton approached, and sniffed at him suspiciously, for they had not yet become friends. On the other side of the rock Clara was lying full-length on the

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moss, her feet crossed, her hands clasped under her head, staring up at the patches of blue sky seen through the chestnut boughs. She sat up when she saw Carleton, and looked at him rather abstractedly.

“Good-morning,” he said. “This is great luck, finding you here. I was afraid you might be at work.”

“I was,” she said, still absently. “I was composing—something I wanted to write——”

“Forgive me, but I wanted so much to see you. It seemed an endless time to wait till this afternoon. Shall I go away, or may I stay a little while?”

“Well—perhaps just a little while,” she conceded with a remote smile. “But this mustn’t be a precedent, you know—else I shall get nothing done, and then I shall be in a bad temper. I am terribly indolent by nature, and you mustn’t encourage me.”

He sat down on the moss, a little below her, but near. She clasped her arms about her knees, and looked about her, sighing vaguely.

“I really was working hard when you came—

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though you mightn't have thought it to look at me," she murmured.

"I didn't think it, or I suppose I should not have dared to address you! You are very good to take my interference so kindly."

"Oh! . . . It is sweet out here, isn't it?"

It was wonderfully sweet, and he looked for some moments in silence down the shadowy slope, at the foot of which the brook ran, unseen but noisy. Clara's liquid greenish eyes showed a soft contentment. Her hat lay beside her on the ground; her hair was a little ruffled, and some bits of dry moss were caught in it. Her feet were pressed into the deep, soft cushion of moss on which she had been lying, and Carleton remembered she had told him that she wore heelless shoes so that she might "feel the earth." She put up her hand now to pin her hair back and to disengage from its glistening black threads the fragments of moss and bark. Then she dipped her fingers into the living moss, touched it caressingly, half unconsciously. Her enjoyment of the earth was like this—deep, constant, but silent. She almost never spoke of it.

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“What was it you were composing?” Carleton asked after a little.

“Oh, a setting for an Irish song I have a fancy for: it’s about a child stolen by the fairies.

“Come away, O human child!  
To the woods and waters wild,  
With a fairy hand-in-hand,  
For the world’s more full of weeping  
than you can understand.”

She hummed the refrain softly, and then said:  
“There’s wonderful material in the Irish music. I don’t care for any music unless it’s national. That’s the trouble with us Americans—we have no national quality. Some people have tried to make something of the Indian music, but it’s too simple, too primitive. I’ve heard some wonderful negro music—not the ‘plantation’ sort, but wild, barbaric, the real thing! But that is African, of course, not American.”

“You are interested in something American, then?”

“Oh—this is only something that ought to be, you see, not anything that is.”

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“ But do you think you ever could be interested in America—going back there, I mean? ”

His heart beat absurdly as he asked that question.

“ Oh, I don't know. Why should I? Go back, I mean.”

“ I don't know . . . unless you went with me. . . . I don't mean that I think particularly of going back . . . but only to be with you, wherever it may be.” He stopped, and then added, in a lower, trembling voice: “ If you can care for me, I want you to live with me . . . forever.”

Clara sat quite still, not looking at him, for a moment. Then she laid her hand on his and said softly, “ You dear! ”

He kissed her cheek, a light, glancing kiss, for she turned quickly.

“ I don't know,” she said.

“ Yes. . . . Yes, you do know, dear. It must be . . . if you can love me.”

“ I do like you very much—more than anyone.”

“ Enough to marry me, Clara? ”

“ Yes—if that were all.”

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“ If it were all? But what else is there? That’s all that matters.”

“ No.”

She was very grave. Her eyes met his clearly, without hesitation.

“ I will marry you if I can. But I’m not sure that I can.”

“ Why? Do you mean that you’re not sure of yourself? ”

“ Yes, I mean that, partly. I’m not sure whether I dare to.”

“ Is there something you distrust about me? ”

“ No, no. I could trust you with anything! ”

“ Then . . . trust me with all.”

“ But I’m not sure that it is right that I should—right for me—to you. It’s too much. I—should be a burden——”

“ Clara! . . . ”

Her eyes filled with tears, and she shrank from him.

“ It’s true—you would find it so! There’s so much about me that is unhappy——”

“ Clara . . . what does it matter? ”

“ Don’t say that.”

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“But I must say it, if I feel it. Nothing on earth matters to me beside you. If you will love me, I shall thank you all my life long.”

“Ah, who knows? You might come to feel me only a burden . . . .”

“Clara, my dearest!”

She protested, with hands outstretched against him.

“No, no; you don’t see! Perhaps you are willing to take the risk, but you don’t see what it would mean to me! You don’t see what it means to me that there should *be* a risk.”

“I do see. And I take that risk, too. I see that it hurts your pride to think that you might owe anything to me. And I am content to be your debtor always.”

“Oh, it isn’t that! It’s because you could give me so much—and I’m afraid I shall make no return——”

“Let me be the judge of that.”

She was silent for some moments, still grave, still resistant.

“How can I let you be the judge and decide it all?” she then asked passionately. “*I* must

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decide, and you must not try to bend my judgment to yours."

"Mustn't I?" he asked softly. "But at least I may plead my own cause. The severest judge allows that."

"No, you mustn't plead. I shall have to decide by myself."

"Of course, in the end, you must. It is all a question of your feeling."

"No, not feeling! Feeling isn't everything. I must *think!*"

Carleton took her hand, that was pulling restlessly at the moss, and put it to his lips.

"I told you in Florence," he said, "that you should not be troubled—that I would not force on you anything you didn't want. I'll try to keep my word."

"Oh, I'm troubled; but that's not your fault. You have kept your word. I wish to marry you—it's what I would choose if I could. I will marry you if I can."

She said this with soft sincerity, looking at him with eyes that were all the more beautiful for their signs of tears.

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“ My dearest, my beautiful one! I have loved you a long time, Clara.”

“ Have you? How long? ”

“ Since I first saw you.”

“ No, you didn't love me then! You were in love with Elizabeth then.”

“ I never was in love with her, or with any other woman! I fell in love with you the first time I saw you, though I didn't know then it was love.”

“ Oh, shame! That's just getting out of it. But you don't mean, really, that you have never been in love? ”

“ I mean it really. Oh, of course I've been interested in other women. But I never told any woman but you that I loved her.”

“ Really? ” She pondered this. “ You are a very sincere person, aren't you? That's what I like about you—and your strength. I think you're very strong.”

“ You do like me a little then? ”

“ Oh, I like you tremendously! ”

“ But you're not in love with me—not the least bit? ”

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“No. . . . No, I think not. I’ve never been in love.” She paused to consider. “Should you like me better if I were in love with you?”

“I like you so much exactly as you are that I can’t say.”

“Then I shall never change! I shall always like you just as I do now, never any more!”

“Nor any less? You must promise that. As for me, though I like you now as much as possible—in fact, to a quite incredible extent—I’m sure that I shall go on liking you progressively more till I’m seventy or eighty.”

“Oh, no—that would be quite too much! I shouldn’t know what to do with you. But what is it you like me for?”

“Oh, I like your eyebrows, and the way you do your hair, and your singing, and your always wearing white, and the curve of your chin. Then you are exactly the right height, and you have a wonderfully charming profile——”

“You are frivolous. I was serious with you and talked about your soul.”

“Yes, because I’m an ugly man, and there’s nothing else to talk of. If I were pretty——”

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“ You’re not ugly. Anyway, it’s much better to be ugly than pretty—for a man. You are exactly the kind of man I think handsome.”

Carleton bowed till his forehead touched the ground.

“ Yes, really you are! Your eyes are wonderfully blue—and I like them set deep in, like that. It makes you look like a fighter. You are very strong, aren’t you? ”

“ Rather. I went in for athletics in college. Ran pretty well, you know, and was useful in football, and so on. But I’m afraid I’m no good at fighting. I’m not a man of action, my Clara. I’m afraid I shall never do anything spectacular for you, though, by Jove! I’ll try, if you want me to.”

“ I’m not sure that I do, Barry.”

It was the first time she had called him by his name. He looked at her eagerly, entranced, and kissed her hand, holding it still clasped in his.

“ I think I like *you* best just as you are, too.”

“ Oh, Clara, don’t say that! It makes me feel what an inglorious person I am. I wish I were somebody very dazzling, for your sake. . . . It’s so uneven an exchange! ”

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"I like you best as you are," she repeated gently. "You are what I think best in the world. I don't care for what you call 'dazzling.' It doesn't dazzle me. You are so much more than that! And I like it that we shall live very quietly . . . ."

Suddenly she rose on her knees and put her hand on the rock to help herself up.

"But I didn't mean to say that . . . as though it were all settled! . . ."

"But it is settled!"

Carleton got up, holding fast her right hand, half-lifting her, and took her into his arms.

"Do you think I'll let you go now? Not for all the world and a few stars thrown in!"

He had turned very pale, and his voice shook. In a moment he did let her go, so far as that passionate clasp was concerned, and she moved away from him. But his eyes rested on her still with a possessive look, into which at the hint of defeat had flashed the fierceness of combat.

She stooped for her hat, he caught it up and gave it to her, and they went up the slope to the road.

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They walked in silence back to the Piazza, and parted at the door of the house.

“You’ll come to tea at four?” Clara said with a look almost timid.

“Yes. And then we’ll have our walk.”

He could not tell just what her visible agitation meant; whether he had offended or frightened her by his impetuosity. Certainly he had broken the letter of his agreement with her; but it was inevitable that this should have come, sooner or later. It was impossible that he should be as passive as he had half-promised to be. Clara could not be left entirely to her own devices. He could not be negative in his attitude toward her, nor had he been so at any time during these weeks at Bagni. He had been wooing her, and she had been consenting. And now she ought not to be disturbed by a definite expression—unless she had been coquetting with him; and he did not believe that. What disturbed her, doubtless, was the necessity of an explanation, which she had hinted at and then precipitately retreated from. But that, painful as it was, must be faced—they must face it together.

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After he had left her this feeling of pain was merged and lost in the deeper feeling of joy. He went over and over in memory every word of their talk, each look and tone of Clara's, that light kiss, that long moment when he had held her in his arms. She had promised herself to him. True, she had made a reservation—and he had refused to consider it. They were not yet in absolute agreement; but nevertheless he was joyous, and he became more so as the day passed, and she was in his sight.

The town for which they were bound lay deep in the hills, and far from any beaten track. They had seen it at a considerable distance, from another hill, and had been struck by its curious form, which suggested a monastery or a military formation. Charming was the mountain-path they followed, skirting the nearest hills, and wandering up a long, narrow valley, crossing on little bridges made of halved tree-trunks from side to side of a rushing brown brook; passing through copses of trees, by wonderful cascades where the brook plunged from one level to another, by little fields of turf and nurseries of young trees, divided by ancient walls,

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and vineyards; and at the head of the valley a mill and peasant's house. Above this mill the climb was steep, and the stream plunged over a rocky bed, with only a pool here and there to rest in. By one of these pools, under drooping trees, they sat a little while; and Clara laughed at the black dragon-flies skimming in crowds over the water, and cried: "They are exactly like black cats!"

For a long time she had been perfectly quiet; but now suddenly her spirits rose. She became gay and gayer. She ran on ahead, singing to herself by snatches, and occasionally calling to Carleton and Mrs. Mallot:

"Look at my flowers! Did you ever see anything so blue? What a heavenly day! . . . See the sky through those olive-branches; it is absolutely purple. . . . Look back! Oh, do look back!"

At each turn of the path they must look back; for framed on its hill-top at the mouth of the valley was a wonderful clump of brown roofs and walls, flanked by giant cypresses; and beyond this, as they climbed, came lifting into view the real mountain-peaks, bare and glinting in the sun.

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By a lane between hedges covered with linen laid to dry they finally reached the town. From its highest point, the terrace before the church, they could look round the whole circle of mountains, range after range fading away into blue distance. It was a perfect day; a strong breeze sweeping a multitude of light clouds over the mountain-tops, folds of mist softening all distant outlines, yet the whole effect one of clearness and brightness. The wind had the sweetness of the leagues of solitary forest over which it came, and the freshness of the sea that lay just out of sight.

Clara stood, breathing it in, and gazing, with her gathered flowers dropping one by one from her hands. Then she turned and gave all the remaining flowers to Carleton, saying:

“Here’s flowers for you:

Hot lavender, mints, savory, marjoram;

The marigold, that goes to bed with the sun,

And with him rises weeping; these are flowers

Of middle summer, and I think, they are given

To men of middle age; You are very welcome.’”

And he was quick enough to reply:

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“‘Now, my fairest friend,

I would I had some flowers of the spring, that might  
Become your time of day . . . daffodils,  
That come before the swallow dares——’”

Clara, laughing, turned and ran down the slope into the little square of the town, leaving Carleton to follow with Mrs. Mallot. They had bread and cheese, beer and plums at a table set out before the single place of refreshment; and a crowd of children collected about them to stare, to whom Clara presently sang a rollicking Irish ditty, much to their amazement. She was aglow with colour and light. Her eyes often met her lover's in a long look; her red lips smiled at him. He had no word alone with her that afternoon; she arranged it thus, and he acquiesced. It was enough for him, for the time, to be with her, to look at her, and to feel the soft emotion that thrilled in her, that lent a peculiar grace to each motion of hers; and to know that he had roused this in her, and it was for him.

## CHAPTER XVIII

**B**UT when the next day passed, and the next, without a chance of seeing Clara alone, Carleton became uneasy and rather angry. The Rasolli family had arrived at the hotel, and Clara seemed to be absorbed by them. She could, however, so easily have managed what Carleton plainly showed he wanted, that her omission to do so was ominous. If she did not want to see him, it was because she meant to hold him off. And he fancied that he perceived this in her manner—a sudden definite withdrawal from the intimacy that had been theirs for weeks past. She was certainly more nervous, and she seemed actually to dread being left with him for a moment. He pitied her obvious disquietude, but at the same time he felt that the reason of it must be cleared up by a talk between them. It could not be done by her “thinking” in solitude; and he was hurt

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and irritated by her attitude, her apparent fear of him.

For the afternoon of the second day a drive had been arranged. The Contessa Rasolli and Francesca, Clara and her mother, young Malvini and Carleton, went in two carriages. Carleton was with the two girls, and Malvini, who for some time past had been almost inseparable from Mrs. Langham, escorted the elder ladies. It was Mrs. Langham's affair and her arrangement.

In other circumstances Carleton might have enjoyed it. Francesca interested him and even as it was he found himself liking to hear her quick, vivacious talk. She was sombre and passionate in look and character. Her black hair was lit by russet gleams, and her black eyes had a melancholy fire in their depths. She was slender and graceful, with a definite simple elegance in the way she dressed and carried herself. Carleton wondered that she was still unmarried, while she talked to him about the life of the Italian women of her class.

"I wish they could *do* something," she said with energy. "If they would get outdoors, walk or

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ride, or do gymnastics, they would be less unhappy. I would like to start something of that sort. The women I know are morbid, melancholy—you can hardly imagine how much! And most of it, I think, comes from staying in the house, and brooding. I am melancholy, too—because I haven't enough to do. I envy Clara her music. But I can do nothing, except learn languages and dance! . . . This is a sad country—don't you find it so?"

"I find it quite perfect—beautiful and finished."

"Finished! Ah, yes, that's the trouble. It is finished! Nothing more to come or to do! And for that reason it is hard to live in—at least, for those who want to live—for men who have ambition, *par exemple*. For them it is a dead country."

"But, surely, modern Italy is live enough. Some parts of it are almost American!"

"Ah, yes, we try to be! But there again everything is overcrowded. There are so many more men than opportunities. And nothing is paid here. Teaching is worth nothing, writing is worth nothing. No Italian author makes anything."

"Not D'Annunzio?"

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“ Oh, if you have a European public, yes! But who else has? We think if a book sells five hundred copies it is a success! And look at my poor cousin. What is he to do with philosophy? And he wishes a career, he has high desires! ”

“ Ah, well, philosophy—the world has not much use for that in any case.”

“ But some in your country make a success of it. . . . That’s because you are so big and free, and so many are educated. Isn’t it so, Clara? But you don’t know—you are hardly an American at all. Imagine—she has a great, splendid country like that, and she knows nothing about it! ”

“ I like your country better, Francesca dear.”

“ How do you know? You should go and make acquaintance with your own—and take me with you! We will make the voyage *outré mer* together—that is quite proper in America, is it not, Mr. Carleton? ”

Clara laughed. “ Oh, if you will come too, I will go! Let us propose it to our mothers.”

She looked darkly at the carriage ahead of them. There the small Contessa’s lace bonnet and the sweeping plumed hat of Mrs. Langham, and the

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handsome face of Malvini opposite, were partly visible through a veil of dust.

“Let us go a little slower—let them get ahead. There’s so much dust,” she added, and spoke to the driver.

Francesca glanced at her, then, unobserved by Clara, she exchanged a swift look with Carleton. And he felt that the Italian girl understood the whole situation. He felt, too, her affection for Clara. The two were evidently very good and very intimate friends. He remembered what Clara had said long ago—that Francesca was the one person she loved. And he warmed to her and began to hope that she might help his chances with Clara instead of hurting them, as he had at first feared.

Clara was looking pale and tired. For two days now she had had no walk; and when he had asked her to go with him next day she had refused, on the ground that she was going to a dance in the evening. This sort of thing—driving a few miles at a slow pace, and stopping midway for tea—was what he detested, for himself and for her, and it was being more and more thrust upon her. Even

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town, and watched a game of tennis, and chatted with their various acquaintances, and drove slowly home, Carleton returning with Clara and the Contessa, who fluently, in charming Italian-English, discoursed to him on D'Annunzio as a poet, and on the peculiar beauty of Clara, which she declared to be of a perfectly Italian type. "*Me piasche molto, Lei,*" she said, laying her beautifully gloved small hand on Clara's.

Carleton was struck anew by the intelligence and charm of this family; but at the same time he did not see why Clara should be absolutely absorbed in them. She and her mother dined that night with the Rasollis at the hotel; and Carleton, roaming disconsolately about, was asked to join them for coffee in the billiard-room. Later he walked back with the Langhams to their house; and at the door he said, "I suppose it's too late to ask to come in."

Mrs. Langham said: "For my part, I should be charmed, but I have a frightful headache from the glare this afternoon, and am going to bed."

And Clara hesitated, so that he gave it up.

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dancing was better than this, though it involved late hours and consequent fatigue—and in this Carleton was unselfish, for he did not dance.

“I hope you like outdoor things,” he said abruptly to Francesca. “Walking, and tennis, and so on.”

“Oh, I am not at all athletic,” she confessed. “I know I *should* like it, but really I don’t! Except I fence a little, and I adore dancing.”

He sighed. “And I cannot dance! I foresee that I shall see nothing of you. You will be driving, and tea-ing, and doing society, and I shall be tramping the hills alone, or with Mrs. Mallott. I don’t believe she’ll desert me.”

“But it is you who desert us! Isn’t it, Clara? How can you prefer tramping to tea with us? Here is a bargain: If you will come and watch us dance, we will watch you play tennis. Surely that is as good as climbing hills.”

“And we have climbed all the hills, besides,” said Clara. “Don’t you think you’d like tennis, for a change?”

“I don’t believe I want a change,” was his reply.

They stopped for tea at the hotel in the lower

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“But at least you’ll go out a little while tomorrow afternoon? Even if you don’t want a real walk, you ought to have a stroll at least.”

“Well, I will go. No doubt Francesca will, too. Come to tea at half-past four.”

She spoke quite coldly. And Carleton went back to the hotel, vowing that he would see her alone next day, and that “Francesca” should be warned off.

He found her quite willing. She was sitting near her mother when he went back to the billiard-room. The Contessa, her fingers flying in some silken crochet-work, was talking to Mrs. Mallot. The two Crawfords were playing billiards. There were some of the new people also in the room—an American family of daughters, and a fat German baron with his wife. Carleton sat down beside Francesca, and she managed so that he began at once to talk on the subject uppermost in his mind. He realised and was grateful for her interest in him, and her practical way of showing it. He knew that she had been studying him, and judged that on the whole she approved him. She was clever, he saw, and very much more mature than

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Clara, and in spite of her frankness, her sincerity, she struck him as infinitely *rusé*, beside Clara, or, indeed, any other American woman he knew. She had the subtlety, the complexity, that seemed to him characteristically Italian. But now, putting herself aside, she went straight to the point that most interested him.

She began to talk of Clara, her improved health and spirits, and her character, in a way that implied her knowledge of Clara's relation to him. And her kindness and tact were such that Carleton found himself plunging into confidences. He told her that he wanted to see Clara alone, and she immediately arranged a plan for the next afternoon. She seemed quite to understand that Clara was trying to avoid that interview, and why.

"Clara is difficult," she said, nodding thoughtfully. "But one must not indulge her. She has been too much indulged all her life. I mean she has been allowed to follow out her moods. Her moods take possession of her, rule her, drive her. She has never had control, discipline. So she does not always know her own will, her own mind. She flies off—the more one pursues, the faster she flies

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—and perhaps all the time she really desires not to fly. She has the musical temperament, too—superficially it is unreasonable. But Clara has depth—she has reason if she will only use it. Of course, her life—her home, if one may call it so—has been the most unfortunate possible.”

“Yes, but she can outlive all that,” said Carleton.

“Truly, I think so; but she should be separated entirely from the mother. If necessary, she should go to America—as far away as possible. Her mother is the worst person in the world for her. She torments poor Clara in a thousand ways—oh, without meaning it! Just now it is a question of this young fellow, Malvini. It is partly this that now makes Clara so moody. It is becoming much talked about, and Clara fears—I don’t know what, she has not said, but she is unhappy about it. I think she is too sensitive to Mrs. Langham’s behaviour. But, after all, one can understand that.”

“I did not know—she said nothing to me about it—about Malvini,” said Carleton, frowning. “Except that I knew she disliked his coming so

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much to the house. . . . But I can't see why that should make her unwilling to see me."

"But I can see," said Francesca, and her brilliant eyes seemed, in fact, to see everything. "It brings up again all that is unhappy in her life—and that seems to stand in the way of her marrying. She has truly a morbid feeling about her mother; but it is a terribly strong one. And she is proud, Clara! She wishes to marry, but not at a disadvantage——"

"That is foolish! . . ."

"Perhaps; but it is very natural to a woman. It is natural, too, to run away when some one pursues with resolution! This, too, is disturbing."

She smiled gaily. Carleton was finding her very charming, and would have been glad to talk indefinitely; but now the Contessa rose, and, with many farewells, carried her daughter off upstairs.

Their plan for next day was carried out. They all had tea together on the balcony of the Langhams' house; then the Contessa was left to chat with Mrs. Langham, and the other three went off to walk in the wood. As they came to the turn in

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the road from which the balcony could be seen, the Contessa was perceived, standing and signalling vigorously in their direction.

“It is for me—my mother wants me for something,” exclaimed Francesca. “I must run back for a moment.”

“We’ll go back with you,” said Clara hurriedly.

But Francesca was already some paces away.

“Go on—I shall overtake you in ten minutes!” she cried.

It would have been awkward to run after her; Clara stood still for a moment, then turned and walked slowly on.

“It was hardly worth so much trouble as that, was it?” she asked coldly.

“Yes—because it was necessary,” said Carleton with firmness.

“Why could you not have said so simply, then, without this ridiculous manœuvring with Francesca?”

“I did try to say so, and you showed plainly that you were manœuvring to avoid it.”

“Haven’t I a right, then, to avoid what I wish to avoid? . . . You are ungenerous. I told

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you that I must have time. Now you are hurrying me, troubling me——”

“I do not mean to hurry you—if I can help it. . . . It is true that I must trouble you. I feel that that can't be avoided because of your feeling. I must trouble you by talking to you now, because I feel that you are not now in a position to ‘think,’ as you said, to good effect. You must know exactly my point of view, my feeling. Then, take whatever time you need to think it out, or feel it out. If you wish, I will go away and leave you quite free.”

As she did not speak, he added, after a moment: “That is quite fair, isn't it?”

“Yes, from your point of view,” she said in a low voice.

“Doesn't it seem fair, to you?”

“It seems useless—because I *do* know all the things that matter, and I am as well able to judge now as I shall be later—better, perhaps, for you may only confuse me.”

“I must risk that. We must talk things out, Clara—it's the only way to be clear.”

She made a weary gesture. “I *hate* unnecessary

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talking. It doesn't make things clearer—it only mixes them up.”

“I am sorry, but as our views of what is necessary don't agree, will you make this concession to me?”

“I don't think . . . you ought to ask concessions just now.”

“But I do ask this one. I'm not acting quite selfishly, Clara. This, in my judgment, is best for you.”

“But I can't see why you should be judge of what is best for me. It hasn't come to that yet!”

“Yes, indeed, it has. I have, to a certain extent, a right to judge for you, or at least to influence your judgment.”

“No—no, I can't see that you have!”

“Clara, you gave it to me three days ago, here. Unless you were lying when you said that you cared more for me than for anyone else, and that you wished to marry me.”

“Don't speak so roughly to me! If you don't leave me, I shall certainly cry.”

“Then cry, if you must, Clara. . . . If you will listen to me sensibly for a few minutes, I

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will promise to be as brief as possible. And I will go away to-morrow if you wish it."

Clara sat down on a rock by the roadside, and said chillingly:

"Very well, then, since I can't escape. . . . But you weren't exactly telling the truth when you said that you wouldn't force on me anything I didn't want, were you?"

Carleton looked at her straight for a long moment, then asked quietly: "Do you really not want it?"

She caught her breath, and said faintly: "It isn't only a question of what I want, but of what I can have. . . . I am thinking that I have made a great mistake. I told you that I was uncertain—but I ought not to have told you anything at all. . . . It is all too horrible."

She hid her face in her hands, shivering. Carleton sat down beside her and tried to draw her hands away, but she resisted. Suddenly she turned and flung herself face downward on the rock, and began to weep piteously.

"Clara! Clara!" he cried, half-distractedly. "Don't do that! For Heaven's sake, stop, my

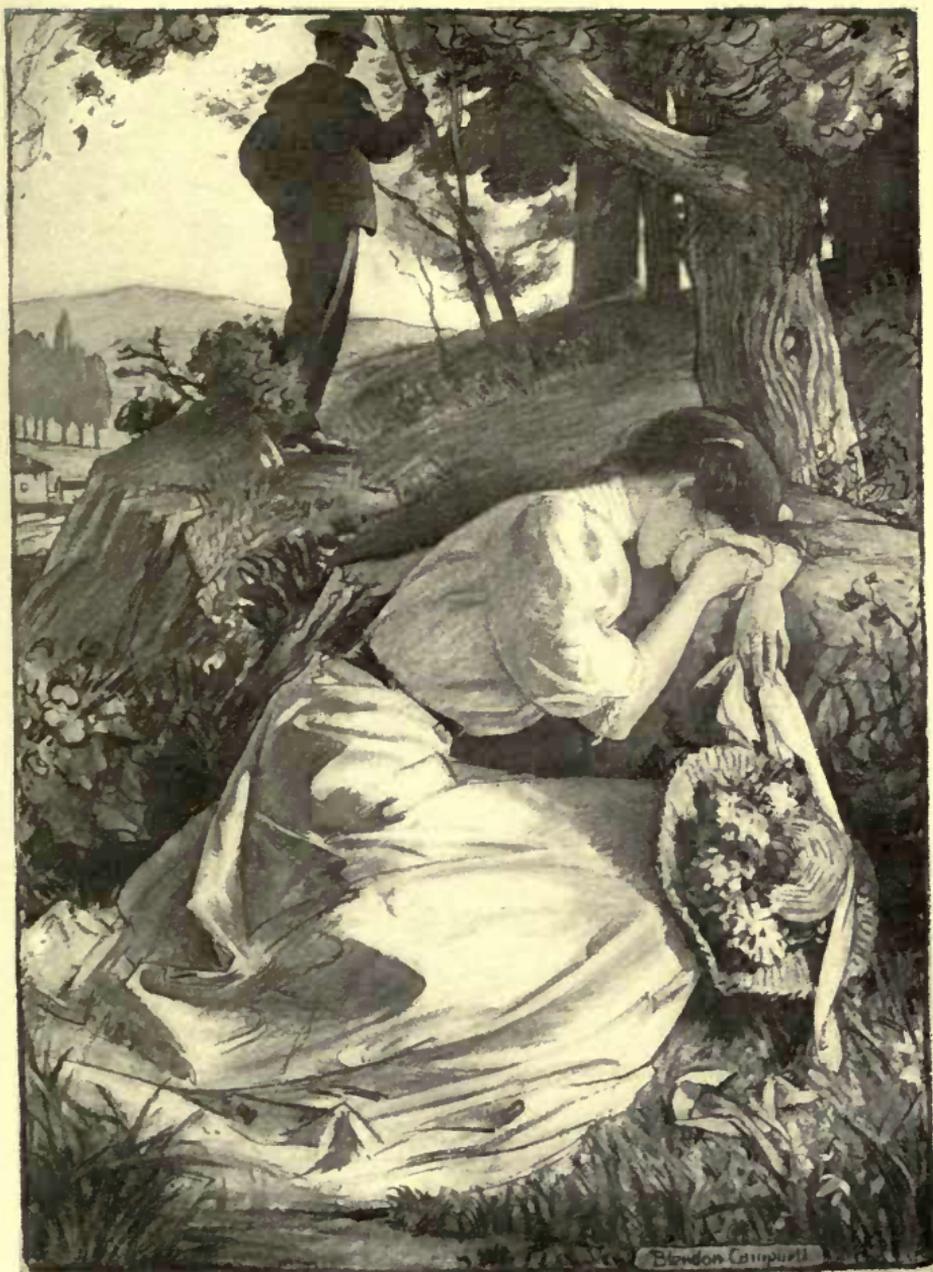
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poor darling! I won't say anything more; I'll go away—anything you say—! Don't, you tear my heart! My poor, poor little girl! . . . Oh, Clara, forgive me! . . .”

He almost sobbed himself in his alarm and repentance, and knelt by her, making futile efforts to raise her, to catch sight of her face. She shrank away from him, but presently sat up and put her handkerchief to her face, still hiding from him all but a reddened cheek and a disordered *chevelure*.

“Now, see what I have done—made myself a spectacle—supposing anyone comes—and what will Francesca think?” Her voice was trembling and plaintive, and Carleton's heart melted within him.

“Forgive me, dearest,” he pleaded. “I didn't mean to distress you—I had no idea you would feel in this way. All I wanted to do, Clara, was to show you that there is absolutely no reason why you shouldn't marry me to-morrow, if you care to for me. There is nothing, nothing on earth that matters, that ought to matter, except your feeling for me. . . . Much as I love you, I would



*“Glancing back, he saw her waver and sink down again upon the rock.”*



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not marry you unless you did care for me. . . .  
I would not dare—for I'm not good enough for you, unless you're unreasonable enough to think me good. But I know that I shall never be happy unless I marry you. I know that you can be the whole world to me—if you will."

Clara shook her head.

"I'm afraid," she said faintly, "I'm afraid I can't. I don't dare."

"Don't say that, my dearest——"

"Yes—I must say it. You know—about me, don't you? You know about my father——"

"Clara, that's what I want to talk to you about! I'm convinced that you're deluding yourself, or have been deluded. It isn't as you may think, my dear one—all that can't affect you——"

"Ah, yes, it does, it does! . . . Sometimes I think it's all a delusion, sometimes I don't believe in it, and I try to go on as if it weren't there. And then it comes back and crushes me! I can't act as if the thing had no existence, and if it has——"

"Clara! Clara, listen to me!" he cried passionately. "I believe firmly that it has no existence. I'll tell you my reasons—I'm sure that I can

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prove to you—there isn't one chance in a million——”

She pulled her hand from his clasp and sprang to her feet. He rushed on:

“But if it were the other way I should love you, want you, just as I do now. I want you, *you*, no matter what misfortune or danger may come. And I can take care of you, Clara. Your life shall be peaceful—I hope happy. And there shall be no risk—to any besides ourselves. . . .”

She stood with her face averted from his. Her breast heaved in a silent sob.

“Will you leave me to myself now?” she whispered.

Carleton took her cold hand and kissed it, and went away deeper into the wood. Glancing back, he saw her waver and sink down again upon the rock.

## CHAPTER XIX

**T**HE dance that night at the Casino was a livelier affair than usual. There were almost a dozen dancing men, and not more than two-score girls sitting demurely round the walls under the chaperonage of their mamas. The large room, in the Empire style, with much white enamel, gilding, and red velvet, looked quite gay when Carleton went into it, about ten o'clock. The women were all in high dresses and hats, Continental fashion; but when they were not dressed in white it was pink, or red; so that they looked like a mass of roses or poppies in the brilliant white and gold setting.

Carleton looked about for the particular group to which at these affairs he attached himself, his custom being to sit most of the time beside Mrs. Langham, to talk to Clara when she came to rest between dances, and to order their carriage for them when they were ready to go. Mrs. Langham did not dance; it did not suit her style. She

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visibly preferred having her dancing, like other forms of exertion, done for her. Carleton saw her now at the upper end of the room, sitting in state. She was by far the handsomest, the most striking woman in the room. She had a man on either side of her, and she was talking, with her indolent, half-insolent look of patronage. Carleton did not approach her, but stood aside, looking among the dancers for Clara. She was not on the floor. Then he glanced along the walls, from one white-robed girl to another. He saw Francesca just rising and gliding into the waltz with the stout Sir Anthony. Francesca danced exceedingly well, Sir Anthony incredibly badly. Francesca danced like an American girl, with an easy and graceful lightness, Sir Anthony like an Englishman who despises dancing. He made a few solemn turns with her, revolving incessantly and ponderously; then they gave it up. Francesca cast a sparkling glance at Carleton as she passed him. She was looking very well, in an ivory-coloured dress. She sat down on the opposite side of the room, where Carleton now perceived the Contessa, engaged in a rapid conversation with another Italian dowager. He started,

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skirting the wall, to go and speak to them. More people were dancing now. He noticed a peculiarly graceful girl in a red dress and hat dancing toward him. Something familiar about her motion fixed his eye; and as she turned he saw that it was Clara. She whirled past without noticing him. She was dancing with Malvini. Carleton stood still and watched her, quite stunned by her appearance.

He had never seen her before dressed in anything but white. This startling poppy-red garb was anything but beautiful, and it completely changed her look. Her hair was done differently, too—more closely, more formally; and the red tulle hat poised on her head in perfectly conventional lines was not at all the kind of thing she was used to wear, nor that suited her style. She looked now quite stamped with conventionality, quite like one of the correct damsels who lined the walls, except that she had an animation that they lacked. She was almost too animated. She was much less beautiful than usual, but more brilliant. She danced with a touch of abandon. It seemed almost as though she wanted to make herself conspicuous; if she did, she was succeeding.

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Malvini was certainly conspicuous among the men. He was the only one who danced well, and he was by far the best-looking. He had a brutal kind of beauty—the low brow, crisp, black hair and bull-neck of a Roman of the decadence. He was talking to Clara while they danced, looking at her constantly, and smiling slightly. They went on dancing till the music stopped; then Clara went to her mother's wing, and Malvini sat down beside her, and they talked during the interval. And when another waltz began they rose and danced that through also.

Carleton had been noticed only by a nod as she passed him. He did not approach her, but sat down beside Francesca, trying to keep his eyes off the figure in red, and talking mechanically. In a few moments, while Clara was dancing, Mrs. Langham rose, shook off her cavaliers brusquely, and sailed across the room to the Contessa. Thus, when Clara came back at the end of the waltz with Malvini, they were all together. Clara took the seat at her mother's side, and Malvini a chair next to Clara. The two were talking rapidly in Italian, and Carleton was conscious of trying vainly

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to follow their conversation through his own with Francesca. Without looking directly at Clara, he was conscious, also, of every slight motion she made, of each glance she gave the man she was talking to. It seemed to him that he had never seen her try so obviously to please. She had never seemed so conscious of herself. She was showing herself off for Malvini's admiration, and his admiration was so obvious that it appeared to Carleton almost insulting. A gnawing pain, a deadening sense of disillusionment and disgust grew and strengthened within him. He made an effort to concentrate his attention on Francesca; and he did concentrate on her an intense gaze—a blue glow that reflected the mounting flame of his anger.

Francesca got him on the floor for the next dance, which was a quadrille. Every man in the room was impressed for the occasion, and Carleton's protests that he could not dance a quadrille any more than a waltz were unavailing. Clara was carried off immediately. Francesca was dancing with Malvini, and Carleton found himself standing next them with the Contessa. He was

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pushed, and pulled, and beckoned through the various figures of the dance; and each moment he felt a deeper and more consuming sense of his own folly and of the general foolishness of the universe.

Mercifully it came to an end at last. He took the Contessa to her seat, and was received with frank hilarity by Mrs. Langham, who was in the habit of mocking the runner's flying feet, though not exactly with laughter sweet.

"Bless me if I ever saw such a spectacle!" she cried. "You look like a mute at a funeral. You take your pleasure sadly, Carleton! Pray, don't let anyone tempt you into that sort of thing again. Really, you haven't the figure for it."

The Contessa patted her partner's arm consolingly.

"Mr. Carleton has much grace," she observed. "He has the grace to oblige an old woman."

"Oh, all the grace in the world," returned Mrs. Langham; "except the kind you use in dancing."

A rapid polka followed, and Carleton saw Clara whirled off again by Malvini. He saw that Mrs. Langham was watching them, with a growing anger smouldering in her cold, black eyes. He

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saw that many other glances, critical, amused, significant, followed those two figures, the most striking on the floor. Many a dowager raised her lorgnette as they passed, and among these was the Marchesa Malvini, a high-nosed lady in a stiff aureole of white hair, who also raised her eyebrows, and her shoulders, and said something obviously unpleasant to the daughter who sat next her.

Clara fairly romped through this dance—gracefully, it is true, but still with a gaiety and freedom too pronounced for the taste of the spectators. Carleton sat, trying to make conversation with the Contessa, but watching perforce Clara's flying skirts; watching, also, the storm gathering behind Mrs. Langham's black brows.

When the music stopped and Clara came back to her mother's side, Carleton heard Mrs. Langham say, in a low voice, but distinctly:

“You will sit out the next dance here with me, and then we shall go home.”

Clara smiled and shook her head. Her eyes were sparkling, her face full of colour. She was panting lightly.

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“No, I have all the other dances engaged. I can't go,” she said.

“But you know I never stay after eleven.”

“Contessa Rasolli will take me home.”

“I wish you to go with me, Clara. You are making yourself too conspicuous.”

Clara's eyes flashed.

“You know what people will say if you take me away now.”

Mrs. Langham bit her lip. “You show a great deal of regard for what people say!” she retorted savagely.

Carleton heard and wished to hear only the first sentence of this conversation. Francesca and her mother were both talking to him animatedly; and the other two sunk their voices so as to be inaudible to anyone. What they were saying could not be guessed from their faces. Clara was still smiling; Mrs. Langham now looked a shade more indifferent than usual.

The outcome was plain, however. Clara refused to go. And after the next waltz—which Clara danced and Malvini sat out beside Mrs. Langham—that lady rose to depart. What was the tenor

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of her conversation with Malvini did not appear, except that he had done the talking and she had snubbed him. When he offered to take her out to the carriage, she turned her shoulder on him and took Carleton's arm.

Meantime Carleton had spoken to Clara, for the first time that night.

"You are not going yet?" he asked.

"No, I shall stay a little longer with Francesca."

She looked at him with bright, impenetrable eyes, and caught Francesca's hand nervously, caressingly, in both hers.

"Good-night, then," he said, putting out his hand.

"You are going? But, of course, it must be stupid for you. *Addio.*"

Her gloved fingers barely touched his, her eyes barely met his.

"Shall I see you to-morrow morning?" he half stammered. "I . . . may be going away in the afternoon."

"Oh, I am so sorry. But I have—I can't promise for the morning."

He looked at her . . .

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Mrs. Langham's hand touched his arm. He turned and went out of the room.

When he had put Mrs. Langham into her carriage and said a brief good-night, Carleton walked up the hill to the hotel, and packed a bag; and early the next morning he left Bagni.

His impulse of flight carried him only as far as Pisa, where in a small and quiet inn he was for three days alone with his reflections. He had left no address at Bagni, no word for anyone that he was going.

At first he did not reflect at all, but simply felt—a tumultuous sense of wrong and pain. Then, as the storm subsided, he realised that for the first time in his life he knew what loneliness meant. He was unutterably, unbearably lonely; empty of anything that could interest or sustain him. Even torment was better than this; and he began to think of going back.

He had never for a moment meant *not* to go back. It had never occurred to him to give Clara up. He felt sure of her. But he was angry with her, furious at what seemed to him her lack of

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reason, her perfect lack of consideration for him. She had treated him as, he vowed, she should never treat him again.

This mood passed. His anger died away, and he began to think. He went out and rambled about the city in solitary musing; he spent hours in the Campo Santo, or watching the flow of the river. With every hour the desire to return to Clara grew stronger. His brooding meditations lost their bitterness and took on the look of hope. He smiled as he remembered a sentence of Goethe: "The boy Cupid clings fast to the skirts of Hope, even when she is preparing with long strides to depart." This was not the picture of his state! His love was no longer the infant, needing Hope's support, but full-grown, lusty, strong with every ounce of his own strength; stronger, indeed, than *he* was! He confessed now that he took strength from his love—that it gave him back his confidence in himself and in life. But Hope, of course, had not deserted him for a moment; only, perhaps, averted her face.

As his calmness returned he began to see excuses for Clara; he began to think his own impetuosity

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foolish and to regret it. She had misunderstood him, he thought, or she had misunderstood life. She was afraid of both—and yet she loved both! Or if she did not absolutely love him as yet, he was sure she would—he was determined she should.

Still, her behaviour with Malvini remained a sore wound to him. He could not understand that. She had professed to him that she disliked the young Italian, disliked his coming to the house, his intimacy with her mother. She had never before, so far as Carleton knew, shown any interest in Malvini; yet she had tried that night to capture his interest, and had certainly succeeded. She had behaved recklessly, going beyond what even her natural coquetry would account for. Why had she done this—made herself conspicuous with Malvini—doubly offended her mother—if it was not to hurt him, Carleton? And if she wanted to hurt him, to affront him, still she need not have behaved so as to draw down upon herself the hostile criticism which was perpetually suspended over their heads, hers as well as her mother's, and on her mother's account. Carleton was as sensitive to that criticism

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of her, to that attitude of potential hostility toward her, as she herself could possibly be. It had hurt him to see, in the little clique of people at Bagni, the inevitable trace of it. Two women going about—without adequate protection or money enough to supply it—with the breath of scandal hanging about them—yes, that was the situation! Friendly as some of those people were to Clara, none of them liked Mrs. Langham; and Clara was made to pay for her mother's faults. Was it this that made her break out—shock them? Was it impatience of them, anger at them? In a way he could understand that; but still it did not explain Clara's behaviour to him.

That was the point: Did she after all think of throwing him over? Her effort to avoid him, her emotion when he asserted his claim, pointed that way. She had denied that he had any claim. But her emotion meant something else, too. It must mean that she cared for him.

When he had come to this conclusion—and all roads led to it—he forgot the rest. It was infinitely true, as he had said to her, that nothing else mattered.

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He telegraphed to Bagni to have his mail forwarded, and he wrote to Clara—a long letter, passionate and tender. He was determined now to carry her away with him at once—as far away as possible, where in a new place she could forget all that was unhappy in her experience. He would take her home—back to the big sordid living city that he thought he had forsaken forever! Its throbbing struggle called him now, drew him by the pulse of his new life. He forgot its ugliness; now he saw it only as the one spot on earth where he had a definite place, a definite work. And with Clara—flower of all charm!—beside him, he could go back to that work with muscles strung, he could hew out there something that would interest her too!

Among the letters forwarded to him he found one from Elizabeth, one from America in a hand he did not recognise, and a note written at the hotel in Bagni. He let the two letters lie unopened and eagerly read the note, which was from Francesca.

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“DEAR MR. CARLETON :

“Perhaps I am meddling, and you may think me wrong to write this, but nevertheless I write!

“Clara is very unhappy. Some of the reasons I know, the rest I guess. I have a piece of news for you: Malvini has been sent away by his family. They had no desire that he should marry a girl without fortune. It suddenly appeared to the Marchesa that he was compromising himself not with the mother but with the daughter! I could not have believed that Clara could scheme like that, but she has done what she wished, to get rid of Malvini. She tells me her mother will not speak to her.

“Poor Clara! There is much more that she tells me, but not in words.

“If we do not see you soon, I shall know that I have made a mistake to write—but no one else shall know it.”

Carleton would have taken the next train for Bagni, but that he counted on a letter from Clara. He had told her that he would wait for her reply, and he had to wait a day for it. He had not, however, promised that he would abide by what she should say, otherwise this reply might have forced him to break once more the letter of a promise to her.

“DEAR BARRY:

“Your letter is a beautiful one and I shall keep it as long as I can. It hurts me, though, because it is so much kinder and sweeter than I deserve, and if it makes me feel too unhappy I

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shall have to destroy it. I can't bear more than a certain amount of unhappiness, and that is why I am writing you now, to say that I can't see you again—or not for a long time, at least, not till all this is forgotten. I am less unhappy when I don't think anything about happiness, or at least don't try for it. In that way I sha'n't make anyone else wretched, anyway—and that is something. What I could *not* bear is to feel that I was making someone else as unhappy as I am myself. You will think very badly of me, I suppose, for a time at least, and perhaps you will be unhappy for a time, but that is better than being so always—and so sometime I think you will say that I was right—right in the end, in ending this, however wrong I was in beginning it. I know that I was very wrong, and I have no excuse, except that I honestly hoped for a time that it would be possible.

“But it isn't possible. You know my father died insane and heaven knows what may come out in me. It must die with me, at all events. The more I care for you, the more sure I am that I dare not give you such a burden. It wouldn't make mine lighter if you shared it, but a thousand times heavier. So, you see, for your sake and mine too, it can't be.

“I have thought it all out now—I have thought of nothing else all these days—and now I see more clearly than I ever did before. I am glad you went away—it is easier to write, and besides your going helped me to see more clearly. You never *could* bear with me, you see, even my ordinary faults, and yet you are patient too—you have been very good to me.

“Good-bye—good-bye, and forgive me—not for this, but for what I did before.

CLARA.”

## CHAPTER XX

**A**S the leisurely afternoon train climbed the long slope toward the hills, stopping at an infinity of small stations and not thinking it worth while to get up speed between, Carleton remembered his unread letters, and took them out of his bag.

Elizabeth's was written from her English country house. It was a long letter, in pensive lingering mood. It had an autumnal flavour. It had the feeling of a long still autumn afternoon, with falling leaves, pale misty sunshine; with a quiet undercurrent of sadness, regret, resignation.

This was the first word he had had from her since their parting; and its sweetness, with the little tang of sharpness that she could not help putting in, half-relieved, half-pained him. She wrote of her pursuits, literary and social; of the Blandons and Mr. Harris, who were settled in her neighbour-

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hood; and Carleton learned that Mr. Harris had gone direct, instead of lingering in Italy as he had proposed.

Proposed? What might not Mr. Harris have proposed and Elizabeth agreed to, by this time? This gently melancholy letter, with its hint of reminiscence of the warm summer, its hinted forecast of chill winter, might be her way of preparing the announcement he expected. He was conscious of grudging Elizabeth to Mr. Harris. It was not that he did not want her to be happy and consoled; but of course that he did not think Mr. Harris good enough. If she could be consoled by *him*——

The opening of the other letter put Elizabeth out of his head. There was a brief note from Forbes, the man to whom he had written at Washington, asking for information about Charles Langham. Forbes wrote from some place in the mountains. He had not known Langham, but he knew a lady who had known everybody in Baltimore for the last forty years, and he enclosed a letter from her and said that Carleton might write her direct if he wished. This was the letter, writ-

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ten with extreme care and in the precise delicate hand of an elder generation:

“Remember Charles Langham? Indeed, my dear Mr. Forbes, I do, as anyone must who ever knew him. And I knew him well. His mother, though older than I, was an intimate friend. I was present at his wedding. I knew his romance. Indeed I knew him from the time he came home from college, at twenty. He was married at twenty-two. And let me say now that I shall never for one instant believe that he was insane, in the proper sense of that word. I know his family-history well on both sides. There never was a whisper of anything wrong. His father was killed in the War of Secession. His mother died a few years since. She had been a remarkably strong woman up to the time of the tragedy, but she never recovered from that. He was her only son, he was idolised. Mrs. Langham showed me the letter she wrote to her son’s widow, offering to take the child and bring her up; it was returned unanswered.

“Is it reasonable to say that a man of unblemished history, with a brilliant college-record, a favourite in society, and, young as he was, already noted in his native city for his talent as an orator and his grasp of public questions—is it possible to think that such a man, against whom there was never a breath up to the *time* of the tragedy, could be mentally unsound to the extent of cherishing a *delusion* which cost two lives? Is it not more natural to believe that he was temporarily *maddened* by the discovery of treachery in the woman he (however foolishly) adored? Any man of spirit might be so maddened by such a discovery—much more a man of Charles Langham’s passionate tempera-

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ment. This, I shall always believe, is the true explanation of his terrible act. That Augusta was *innocent*, and he a *maniac*, is what no one will credit who knew them both.

“I knew Augusta slightly. She was a reigning belle in Baltimore for two years before her marriage. She was, of course, extraordinarily beautiful. But I was never attracted to her, even though Charles begged me to like her, for his sake. She cared nothing for women and would make no effort to please them. She had a great many suitors, some more brilliant in fortune than Charles, but none so *personally* brilliant. He swept her off her feet; he had all the gifts that women love. He was an ideal lover. I shall never forget the scene at their wedding, when they stood together after the ceremony and he bent to kiss her. It seemed that they must be blessed, with youth, beauty, love for their portion.

“Well, we know the result. Augusta tired of life in Baltimore, where a public career was opening to her husband. After the birth of their child they went abroad to live. Seven years later, in the prime of his young manhood, he was dead, with murder and suicide to answer for at the bar of judgment—where, I am certain *she* shall yet answer for the heavier share.

“I loved Charles Langham. He was much beloved. With all his impetuosity, his quick temper, I never knew a kinder heart. He had but one serious fault—he was too easily ruled by those he loved. He sacrificed a career to his wife’s wish, he sacrificed all to her—and how did she repay him? I will not write more now, I feel too bitterly. Even now, more than twenty years since I saw him last, I weep when I think of him. May the earth lie lightly on him, poor boy!

“LYDIA EDGERTON.”

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The formal phrases of this elderly lady gave Carleton the clearest picture he had of Clara's antecedents. By so much as they cleared the picture they raised his heart, elated him. The shadow sank and died away—it was the past history of a woman's selfishness, a man's weakness—no more. The present was once more light to him, and the future full of light.

Clara's letter, by its spirit, bade him come and take her in spite of herself, and this he meant to do. Once more she seemed to him all sweetness, all charm. He forgot the things that had so lately angered him. She was to him like a morning landscape: his rising love struck with light the highlands of her nature and left all else in obscurity. Love at its meridian would see more clearly, and yet burn with a deeper fire.

He was welcomed back to the hotel by Mrs. Mallot, Contessa Rasolli, and Francesca. After dinner the Italian ladies took him up to their little sitting-room, gave him coffee, begged him to light his cigar, and Francesca said:

“Clara will be here soon. She spends her evenings here with us.”

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She beamed on Carleton with a look of happiness. He had already thanked her. He wondered that she should have taken his cause so much to heart; she was going almost too fast.

“Perhaps she ought to know first that I am here,” he said. “Or let me come in later, if you will.”

“No, you shall stay with me,” the Contessa said, laying her hand on his. “And Francesca shall go to meet our Clara. She will not be frightened away by you—you shall see.”

His heart beat uncomfortably fast while Francesca was gone. He could hardly attend to the Contessa’s kindly chatter. He put his cigar down unsmoked and longed to get up and walk round the room. It seemed an ominously long time before the two girls appeared at the door.

Clara came in, and her eyes, in a wonderful look, pierced to that heart of his, making it pound the faster. She was beautiful, with the gold scarf framing her pale face, that flushed at the clasp of his hand on hers. The two ladies, their hostesses, melted away into the next room. Clara yielded both her hands, but murmured as she looked up at

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him and the glittering drapery slid from her head to her shoulders:

“This isn’t right. . . . You should not have come.”

“It is right—the only right thing.”

He drew her with him to the sofa; they sat down together. He had not taken his eyes from Clara’s face, and now he cried with pain, “How tired you look, dearest—almost ill! Have you been ill, Clara?”

“No—not exactly. I haven’t been very happy—that’s all.”

“Haven’t you? And what have I been, do you think? Oh, Clara, you will never drive me away from you again?”

“I—ought to,” she said. “I tried to—I did mean to send you away—for always.”

“Did you think for a moment you could? I don’t believe it. . . . You must altogether stop caring for me first. . . . And you *do* care a little?”

She looked at him; her eyes glowed. For the first time he felt, “She loves me!” And he caught her in his arms and kissed her lips. . . . She

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drew away from him, all rose-colour now, glowing, with downcast eyes.

“Do you really want me,” she stammered, “in spite of—no, listen!—in spite of everything? Do you think you could care for me so much—much, much more than you pity me? Else I could never——”

Carleton turned pale. “Don’t you know?” he said, barely audibly.

She still held away from him, her hand on his breast.

“But still I shall be unhappy—I can’t help it, even if you——”

“No, you shall not be. There is no reason why you should not be happy, and you shall be! You shall be light-hearted, my dearest, I promise you, and I will sweep anything that troubles you out of the way—*I will crush anyone*——” he stopped, breathing hard, caught her to him, then sprang up.

“First read this,” he said.

He had not dressed for dinner—he had the letter in the inside pocket of his coat. Clara took it, with a wondering look, and read it, while he paced about the small room. Before she had

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finished reading, the tears began rolling down her cheeks. The sheets of the letter fell in her lap, and she hid her face and wept.

“You see . . .” Carleton said. “That is the truth.”

He knelt beside her.

“You know it is the truth, don’t you?” he demanded. “Look at me, Clara. . . . I have felt all along that this was the truth of the story. I would stake my life on it now. It can’t be otherwise. . . . You have been cheated out of your peace of mind so far, but I swear you sha’n’t be cheated any longer. It’s a lie—a horrible wilful lie that has been hanging over you all these years! You shall be rid of it now. . . .”

“But—even so,” said Clara pitifully, “even if we didn’t believe in that any longer, think what there is behind me—think what it means, all that happened. . . . I am afraid.”

“Afraid of what? You are you. We’ll forget the rest—all that troubled you.”

He took her hands and kissed them, and laid his cheek on them, murmuring words of passionate endearment.

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She gently disengaged her right hand, and pulling at a thin line of gold about her neck drew out a jewel suspended by it and hidden in the bosom of her dress. It was a tiny miniature, set with brilliants and pearls. She unfastened the chain and laid it in Carleton's hand.

He held it to the light, studying the face— young, bright in colour, brilliant with life and spirit. Unmistakable was the impression conveyed by this inch of painted ivory. Carleton could see the man—high brow, dark chestnut hair, hazel eyes, sensuous mouth, cleft chin—the smile, the flash of the eyes, the proud carriage of the head—the likeness, too, to Clara.

“He had it done for me,” Clara said softly, “when I was seven. He was so sweet to me! I've worn it always, ever since. I don't want to forget him. I've written down every single thing I remember of him, so as not to forget. Even that day, when they took me away and told me he was dead. And I have grieved for him—oh, nobody knows how much. . . . I did love him very dearly—even a child of eight, you know——”

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She took back the miniature, looked at it, and clasped it round her neck again. She had dried her tears. Now she looked at Carleton broodingly.

“Think how much it would have meant to me if he had lived,” she said. “And he knew it—he loved me too. He must have suffered—to forget me—to take himself away from me. He could not have done it, I think, if he had been himself.”

“I think so too—if he had been calm and able to consider. But he was not—he was suddenly thrown from his balance. But that means nothing, beyond the fact. Tell me—you remember nothing that could not be so explained, do you?”

Clara shivered. “I remember that something was the matter—that day. We had been riding together, he and I—I had a little white pony—and his horse kept leaping and tearing about, and set the pony off, so that it ran away with me. . . . And he would not talk to me. . . . We had some ices at the Casino and went back to the hotel. . . . I remember the flowers, though it was winter. . . . And he held me and kissed

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me and cried when he left me. . . . I was waked up in the night and dressed and taken away, by my governess and a lady in the hotel. I didn't see my mother for a long time afterwards. I remember that everyone looked scared. . . . and that I was frightened to death. . . .”

Carleton got up and took another restless turn about the room. His face wore its grimmest look.

“Who told you?” he asked.

“Oh, many people—my governess, the lady, I've forgotten her name—and my mother, not then, but long after. None of them told me everything, of course, but somehow I learned it.”

“Of course. . . . I wish I had been there.”

Clara smiled tragically. “Why, what could you have done? You would have been a nice boy of about fifteen!”

“I would have taken you up and carried you away—away from everybody—as I shall do now.”

“Ah—who knows.”

“Who knows what? That I shall carry you away? What do you say to America—for a time at least? It will be different from anything you've known.”

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“What I say now is that we are keeping those poor ladies out of their room for a most impolitely long time. I must call them back.”

She rose. A chill struck through Carleton.

“Clara! You—for a moment you frightened me. You change so—your manner changes—a flash and you seem a thousand miles away! A minute ago you were near me, and now—how do I know what you are thinking!”

“I am thinking,” said Clara wearily, “that I have been made to think too much. I have been made to doubt too much—to question too much. I doubt and question everything—everybody! If I am changeable—and I know I am and can’t help it—the reason is—what you know. I have seen too much—too much that is sad and dreadful—too much of life. Is it any wonder that I’m afraid of it? Of myself—my own moods—my own character—yours too! Yes, I am afraid of you! . . .”

“Already! And a little while ago, here——”

“Yes, yes! . . . But we must not stay longer. . . .”

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“ Very well. I will go. Let me take you down, if you are going home. And I know what I have to do, Clara, to-morrow.”

“ To-morrow? ” She paused by the door leading to the other room.

“ Your mother. I should have talked to her long before this.”

“ But wait! First I must be sure—quite, quite sure. . . . ”

“ No, or I shall never be sure of you! ”

“ But she—my mother will not forbid me. Her consent is a formality.”

“ It is not her consent I want—but a good deal more. Something that no one has got from her before, I daresay! ”

“ What . . . do you want? ”

“ The truth, simply. The truth about anything that affects you.”

“ The truth!— About?— But she will never answer you—won’t even listen to you! ”

“ I shall make her. Do you think I can’t see—clearly now—that it’s a question of your happiness and mine? Do you think I’ll let anything stand in the way? She *shall* answer me.”

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“ Oh, don't— Barry, you forget—you can't treat her so——”

“ We won't talk of it.”

He stood pale, frowning, set.

“ Will you call the Contessa, please? I will bid her good-night.”

“ But, I beg you, do not think of talking frankly to my mother! Only consider—think what it will mean to her——”

“ Yes, and what it means to you—and to me. Oh, I'm selfish enough! She must give way. It's your peace of mind—and mine—against a temporary trouble to hers——”

“ But what *good* will it do——?”

“ This—that if she has lied to you—and I believe she has—she must confess it. If she has put this fear of hereditary taint in your mind because of her own cowardice, she must say so and clear it away. Is that too much to ask?”

“ Too much—yes,” said Clara faintly. “ She is my mother, after all.”

“ Yes, and you need not fear I shall forget it. I have some ability to put a thing clearly, without unnecessarily wounding. Trust me in this, Clara.”

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“ I cannot. I can't tell you to go to her.”

“ Then will you promise me here now, solemnly, to marry me within a month? If you promise, there is no need now of the other.”

“ I—can't promise.”

“ No. Even now I am losing you. . . .  
Clara . . . good-night.”

He did not wait to make his adieux to the other ladies; Clara had that task for him. Her face struck them with consternation.

## CHAPTER XXI

**N**OW, at last, Carleton fully recognised what before he had only vaguely apprehended—the fact that Mrs. Langham was blocking his path—Clara's path—to happiness; for he had all a lover's certainty that those paths must be one. Not directly; for her direct influence had been thrown, so far as he could see, in his favour. But indirectly, by virtue of what she had done in the past, she blocked him. She stood there in the way like some huge, malign figure of stone. She cast a shadow on Clara which threatened to be permanent.

And Clara shadowed, oppressed, was Clara uncertain of herself, uncertain of all things. Well might she doubt life and her own capacity for it! She had had too heavy a burden, as she said. The sorrow of the world was not a vague abstraction, as it should have been, to her youth, but a crushing reality. She had been robbed of the joy of youth;

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it had been almost crushed out of her by the weight that now threatened to divide her from him. He had felt this night more sharply than ever the struggle in her mind. He thought he saw that she had really meant to give him up. And, for the first time, fear invaded his soul.

And yet he felt now that she loved him, even with the touch of passion that till to-night had been lacking. Up to this time she had held herself away from him, giving him affection, liking, confidence—mutely promising more—much more—but still withholding it. But to-night——

There was that streak of wildness in her. There was intensity and passion at the bottom of all these uncertainties and moods of hers. There was a kind of violence which might hurl her on some desperately mistaken course. Was he to lose her, after all, when she had come to love him—not, perhaps, as he loved her, but still with her feminine fire, clinging, poignant, sweet?

He felt the fear that held her back—a fear that reason could dissipate for the time, but that ever returned, formless and terrible. It was the effect of a habit of mind, fixed from her childhood. She

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had been taught to see herself in a particular light, and no effort of hers or of others had been able to alter it materially. She had seen herself marked out as a victim of fate; she could not forget it.

“Taught” was too definite a word for the process, however. No one, he was sure, had ever definitely told her that she was liable to the fate that had overtaken her father. Least of all would her mother say such a thing to her. She might never have spoken to Clara on that subject. Nevertheless, it was she who had involved Clara in it, had fixed the mark on her and darkened her whole life and mind.

And she had done it out of pure egotism, the instinct of self-preservation, undoubtedly the strongest of the instincts by which she lived. Carleton believed implicitly now in the correctness of the general view of her and of the tragedy that had come about through her. He did not doubt that further evidence of the sort given by Mrs. Edgerton’s letter could be got—further proof against her. He did not doubt, either, that she could, if she would, demolish the lie that she had tried to rear up as a vain protection to herself.

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It had not protected her; it had only injured Clara.

She could say, if she would, that she had lied about the circumstances of the tragedy and the time preceding it; that there was no question of homicidal mania or mania of persecution; that her husband was under no delusion; that her lover met the fate he had risked; and that in the end she was responsible for the situation and the result.

If she would say this, she must be believed; Clara must believe entirely what now she half-believed. She would be free. But would Mrs. Langham, in any conceivable circumstances, admit the truth? She must know it. She could not, as Elizabeth had suggested, by dint of lying have come to believe herself in the lie. She could not really think herself the innocent victim she wished to appear. But if she could be made to see that she was injuring Clara so definitely, so deeply, would she be moved to tell the truth?

She might have seen it, one would think, before; but she had deliberately shut her eyes. But now if it were forced on her? She could scarcely be withheld by the fear of changing Clara's feeling

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for her. There was no feeling between them, no affection; only on Clara's side the sadness of realising that there was none.

Mrs. Langham was not a person easy to read from cover to cover. In outline she was legible enough. Carleton felt that he knew her general character, but not her mind. She had never been unreserved with him; there had never been the slightest approach to intimacy. That night at La Fontanella, when she had talked to him over her late supper in the library, was the high-water mark of their acquaintance. It had never developed into friendship, or liking, or even disliking; at least, obviously. Here at Bagni she had treated him in a casual way, but without the formality due a casual acquaintance. She had simply let him alone; talked to him lightly when the occasion demanded it, and that was all. He felt that he knew her no better than after the first days at La Fontanella.

Now in imagination he tried to reconstruct her, not as she appeared to him or the world, but as she appeared to herself. What was her opinion of herself, her justification, her theory of life? What

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philosophy had she, and what made it worth while for her to dress, dine, drive, and undergo the daily portion of *ennui* which life offered her?

He made allowance, first, for the fact that she was not a definitely reasoning being, for the preponderance of instinct in her, and the strength of the great impetus of life that carries us all on, creatures of reason as well as creatures of instinct. We live, not definitely because we wish to live, but because we are alive. And if we have a strong, healthy body, strong appetites and not much of the pale cast of thought, we can live on through cataclysms that would wreck a reasoning craft; we rise on the crest of the flood of life, while the feebler organism is submerged. We float and feed, not too scrupulously, and survive. We are more or less thick-shelled; we resist the claims or assaults of softer beings. We preserve ourselves, as comfortably as possible. Well, there is a philosophy of life! It was hers, undoubtedly.

Carleton pictured her in her youth by the light Mrs. Edgerton threw—a great beauty, a belle in a small city, courted, flattered, married in a rush by a man whose emotion carried her off her feet—

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and left him later at her mercy. She ruled him through his passion for her, and perhaps despised him for it, being incapable of a generous response. Then, taken out of a conventional and provincial society, plunged into the freedom of European life and manners, what wonder that she lost her head—never having had much to begin with—and eventually went down? It was fairly evident that she had no great love for her husband, and that she misjudged him, miscalculated both his strength and his weakness. That he was weak in letting so weak a woman rule him was clear; but he had the terrible strength of sincere passion. She seemed to have no strength except her monumental selfishness and real indifference to other people. How much this was the cause and how much the effect of the tragedy in her life was a question. She was by nature cold and self-centred; but it was possible that she had loved Malaspina—as much as she could love.

Then, supposing it to have happened: the two men dead there, the scandal, publicity, the glaring white light turned on her and forcing her to hide herself in some corner, and following her wherever

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she turned, in whatever obscurity she lived, even to the present day. She could not but feel *that*, and what had been its effect on her?

First, she had been cruelly punished, unduly punished, unless the price she had to pay were measured by the amount of suffering she had inflicted. Langham's suffering had been more than he could bear. She had borne hers, and perhaps, given her character, in the only way she could have borne it. She had hardened, hardened, till she had a thick shell-armour enclosing and protecting the smallest possible kernel of feeling substance. Or perhaps she had fossilised altogether and was incapable of feeling anything more, except physical discomfort.

Nevertheless, she was, of all the human beings Carleton knew, the least happy, the least to be envied. He realised, when he considered her as she now was, that he was looking upon a wreck. She painfully made herself look as little like a wreck as possible, she abstained from any appeal to the sympathies, she kept to herself whatever she did feel—but in spite of new paint and shining brass she was a helpless, rudderless, unseaworthy

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craft, fit only to lie in harbour somewhere—and she had no harbour.

Carleton did not wonder that she had chosen to keep her child to herself, when everything else had been swept away from her; perhaps it was because she cared for the child, but in any case she would not have given her up to her husband's mother, writing as that lady probably had written. She had kept Clara, perhaps, with some idea of finding a refuge in her. If she had that hope, it had been completely disappointed, and Carleton could not think it Clara's fault. Clara was emotional, expressive, needed affection; if her mother had not won her affection, the fault could not lie with the child. Either Mrs. Langham had not tried or she had failed, for good reason, to make Clara love her. Perhaps she had been handicapped from the beginning by Clara's knowledge and by the effect on her of her father's death. A child of eight, with Clara's temperament, might know and feel enough to make her not quite a malleable substance, even supposing Mrs. Langham's hand to have some skill. From what Clara had said, and Elizabeth, he guessed that this was the case.

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Clara had been all these years a critic of her mother, unsympathetic, standing aloof. And that it must have been difficult for Mrs. Langham to live, even though she were not over-sensitive, in that atmosphere, Carleton could well believe. They had lived, those two, with that gulf between them widening every year. They were unhappy together—why had they not separated?

Here again he fell back on Elizabeth's explanation. Clara felt the tie of duty to her mother, and knew that her presence was some sort of protection or, at least, check. Mrs. Langham might be suspected of a certain recklessness. With no ties, it was hardly to be predicted what she would do. Clara had to some extent imposed her own will on her mother; and Mrs. Langham had indemnified herself by pieces of self-indulgence like her flirtation with Malvini. Clara had put an end to that, she was carrying things now with a high hand, and Carleton saw that this unnatural state of things could not continue. It was equally unfortunate for them both. The natural end of it was his marriage with Clara and departure somewhere well out of range of Mrs. Langham.

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It was Mrs. Langham's desire to be free, and to see Clara married. She might, therefore, be willing to sacrifice something she had hitherto thought essential, if she saw that it stood in the way of Clara's marriage. She might sacrifice her elaborate lie.

It was quite natural, he thought, that she should have lied. It was quite natural, in so complete a catastrophe, that she should have tried to save to herself some warmth of excuse, to shift a burden of blame too heavy to be borne. She would not think at that moment of Clara or the future; but only the terrible present would overwhelm her and force her to defend herself. She would snatch at any weapon. And when she had once taken up that weapon she was never permitted to lay it down, she must be forever on the defensive. Even against Clara—perhaps more than all against Clara—she must maintain it.

And she had to a certain extent been successful. She had created a doubt, in face of the evidence against her. It was possible for her friends to say that she was a cruelly wronged woman. People in general might refuse her the benefit of the doubt,

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but they had to recognise that it existed, if only as a hypothesis. Elizabeth apparently had not believed in it, but it had affected her. The issue had been confused. The Doubt was there. Clara stood in the shadow of it. It stood between her and her lover, dreadfully palpable.

He came back to this—that it must be swept out of the way, with Mrs. Langham's aid or in spite of her. The first would be difficult to manage, the second more difficult still. But it must be done somehow. And he came to the task with more comprehension of her, with more feeling for her, as the result of his night's vigil.

It was past three o'clock when he thought of bed. He had been smoking, walking about his room, sometimes lying down with his hands clasped over his eyes. The dawn, showing grey at the windows, surprised him. A longing for fresh air, stronger than fatigue, came upon him. He went downstairs and let himself out.

In the silence and pale light the great hills seemed to lie like a fairy-world new-made that morning. The cold air had a divine purity; and the shapes of trees and rocks swam liquidly in it

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as if they were still quivering from the creative hand. The sun would rise late, traversing a long arc of sky before it showed above the tops of the hills; but already at its approach colour was waking on the earth and in the air.

## CHAPTER XXII

**E**ARLY in the forenoon Carleton sent down a note to Mrs. Langham, asking her to see him some time that day; and in reply she named the hour of four. Then he wrote a line to Francesca, as she with her mother breakfasted in their rooms, begging her to take Clara out of the way for the time between four o'clock and the dinner-hour.

The mail brought him this from Elizabeth:

“DEAR BARRY:

“Yesterday I had a letter from Augusta asking me to advance her some money, and to-day a telegram making it more urgent and I have sent the money. She intends to leave Bagni and join some friend—Madame Marum—at St. Moritz, and in the fall to go to Cairo with her. Clara is to be turned over to the Rasollis. They have quarrelled, Augusta says, and even Clara admits they are better apart—she and her mother. Very likely you know all this, but I judge from A's letter that you do not. She writes that she has offered to come back and be present at Clara's marriage to you wherever it is arranged to be, but that Clara has given her no definite information on that point, and you have said nothing. She thinks you may come to an agree-

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ment by yourselves—and at any rate it is impossible for her to stay at Bagni any longer.

“I can see the situation, and what I propose is this: Let Clara with her maid come to me here. A little later you will come on, and you shall be married from my house, or in London, whichever you prefer—and so get rid of all the Continental red tape, and perhaps make it easier for Clara in other ways. Augusta can come on for it, if you and she wish. At any rate I am Clara’s relative, you know, and if her mother’s health doesn’t permit her to be here, the poor little girl will be safe under my wing. Send me a line, or better wire to say that it’s all right, and I write to Clara urging this. Do you urge it too. It will make me happier to do this for you—will you give me what happiness you can?”

Carleton put this aside to be answered later, with a pang of gratitude and affection for the writer of the letter, sweet and kind creature that she was! He saw Francesca at luncheon, and learned that Clara was to drive with them to Barga, starting at two and returning just in time for dinner; learned, also, that the arrangement had been settled by which Clara was to pass into the Contessa’s care. Francesca was obviously surprised that he had not been told. He could see that she was uneasy, apprehensive. Affairs had got beyond her comprehension; the air was turbid

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and portentously obscure about them, and she, too, felt the electric tension, the imminence of storm.

The hour of *siesta* found him tired enough to sleep, and he woke refreshed. He prepared for his interview by putting into his pocket some letters—those from Dr. Crittenden, from Mrs. Edgerton, and finally Elizabeth's offering to take Clara; and at four o'clock he crossed the Piazza, just waking to life again behind its shutters, and knocked at Mrs. Langham's door.

He was shown into the *salotto*, where Clara's piano stood in the middle of the floor, with an air of filling the place. The prim chairs and sofas ranged round the walls looked as comfortless as on the first day. The balcony beyond, with its awning, flowers, easy-chairs and tea-table, seemed the only habitable spot.

Carleton waited a few moments; then Mrs. Langham came in and gave him her hand, with a smile almost friendly. She was looking, for her, rather pale and tired. For once she was not on parade, she was not on guard. Her loose violet dress had a *negligé* air. She could not, it struck Carleton, afford to be so informal, if she wished

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to preserve the full effect of her beauty or the illusion of youth. The texture of her aging skin now betrayed itself, and certain faint, dragging lines about the mouth and eyes. And yet, he was oddly conscious she had never seemed so attractive to him; he had never come so near liking her. Her manner of receiving him—perhaps also those long thoughts about her in the night—had put him in a different attitude toward her. She offered him tea—he declined it, out of nervous feeling that her bread just now would choke him.

“Then will you give me some?” she asked, sinking into her low chair on the balcony. “I am really done up—packing and seeing to things. I go to-morrow morning, to Switzerland. I am very glad to see you before I go. I did not know—your leaving so suddenly—quite what to make of it!”

She smiled, still in friendly fashion, and closed her eyes wearily. Carleton gave her the cup of tea.

“That’s good and strong,” she said. “I need something to wake me up. I haven’t been able to sleep of late, and I’ve been taking morphine. This air disagrees with me frightfully—it is so depress-

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ing, and this heat—! I could not endure another week of the place. . . . I am glad you have come back!”

“I couldn’t have stayed away very long,” Carleton said.

He was sitting near her, in a chair rather higher than hers, so that he looked down on her. Her languid figure, in the simple dress that pleased his eye by its pure blue-violet colour, and the signs of sleeplessness and fatigue in her face, made her for the first time seem appealing to him. She drank her tea slowly and left the pause to him.

“I suppose you know why I went, and why I came back,” he said. “I don’t quite know why I haven’t talked to you about it before—but we seemed not much in the way of talking.”

“No. I do not take the usual parental pose. It’s about Clara, of course, that you want to speak?”

“Of course. You know that I want to marry her.”

“I supposed so.”

“Yes. She has known it from the first. But she has been uncertain.”

## *The Eternal Spring*

“Yes, I know. She has talked to me about you. Not lately. In fact, not much since you came—but before. She is to marry you?”

“I wish I knew! By turns I’m sure of it, and then in a flash everything seems uncertain.”

“Ah—girls! If they knew their own minds—” murmured Mrs. Langham vaguely. “Didn’t your going away bring her to terms?”

This question, quite in her ordinary tone, jarred on Carleton. He got up nervously and changed his seat for one farther away.

“I didn’t go with the idea that it would,” he said. “You are willing, aren’t you, that Clara should marry me?”

Mrs. Langham held out her cup to be refilled.

“Certainly I am,” she said deliberately. “Else I should hardly have received you as I have done. . . . I don’t pretend in any way to dictate Clara’s choice or to choose for her in any important matter. She is in most ways unusually mature, and she knows, I believe, what she wants. But certainly I approve of you, so far as I know you. I know nothing against you. So far as I am able to judge, I think you are as likely as anyone to make

## *The Eternal Spring*

Clara happy—as we say. The fact that she thinks so is, of course, my main reason for believing it.”

“She does think so?” cried Carleton, that last sentence quite obliterating the preceding ones of cool commendation.

“You must know as well as I,” Mrs. Langham answered him. “Clara does not make a confidante of me—but I have certainly understood that she thought so.”

Carleton gazed out at the hillside, on which the faintly clouded sunlight lay moist and heavy; his eyes lightened and softened with wistful tenderness.

“I hope I shall,” he said with a slight tremor in his voice. “It will not be for lack of trying if I fail. . . . Clara knows that I have nothing very brilliant to offer her, in the way of position or prospects. Perhaps you know, too, about where I stand——”

Mrs. Langham nodded.

“Clara is absolutely unworldly. She really does not care for money in the least. As to position, it would be a burden and a bore to her to have to keep up any great amount of society. She doesn't

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like it. She likes to work at her music and be alone, and she is indolent. Decidedly she would not be the wife for a man in official position, for instance. . . . It seemed to me that in taste you and she are very well suited. I cannot see why she shouldn't be happy."

There was a silence.

"If only it depended solely on me, and on herself!" Carleton exclaimed. "If there were nothing definite just now to make her unhappy!"

Mrs. Langham set her cup down on the table with a little clash, and frowned.

"Clara makes herself unhappy at times," she said coldly. "What definite thing do you mean?"

"You must know, Mrs. Langham. You know that she has been made unhappy by a certain definite thing in her life. Perhaps you don't know that she has threatened several times to break with me—has tried to do it—for that reason. Even now—even now I do not feel certain of her. She seems uncertain whether she can marry me."

"Clara is capricious," Mrs. Langham said. Her lowered eyelids hid her eyes, and her face looked like a mask in pale wax. "She has more

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than her share of girlish whims. But I believe she did not mean to be taken at her word when she offered to break with you."

"Perhaps not. But this is not whim or caprice that troubles her. You know what it is—you know it is a serious thing—most serious, at least, in its effect on her. She has suffered—she is suffering. She even thinks, because of it, that she—that she perhaps ought not to marry."

Mrs. Langham sat up straight, and the frown drew her black brows together.

"No, she does not think that! Why, she has definitely engaged herself to you—she has told me that she wishes to marry you!"

Carleton felt a pang of pleasure; but his agitation was not lessened.

"She told me, too, that she wished—that she would marry me if she could," he said in a low voice. "But she has never promised absolutely, without condition——"

"She is like many another girl in fearing to bind herself," Mrs. Langham said quickly. She was breathing faster; the violet frills rose and fell on her bosom. "She would make conditions.

## *The Eternal Spring*

. . . And I have known her before to use this pretext to dismiss a man whom she had encouraged. If she uses it now, it is because she has found that she doesn't care for you."

"No. No, it isn't that!" he cried. "She does care for me—I am certain of that."

"Then, if she does . . . I thought it was all settled."

"No. Do you think I should have gone away if it had all been settled? I went because this uncertainty was tormenting her—was more than I could stand. . . . See—this is the letter she wrote me——"

He carried it always with him—the one letter he had had from her. He took it out and unfolded it, hesitating, and then with an appealing look gave it to Mrs. Langham. Then to relieve his uncontrollable nervousness he rose and walked the balcony from end to end, while she read.

Her hand holding the letter dropped in her lap, and she stared out over the railing, her face set and cold. He came back to take the letter from her, and refolded it with jealous care. Still she did not speak. But after some moments she rose

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abruptly and said, pressing her hand over her eyes: "This glare is hurting my head. Do you mind putting the chair inside?"

He obeyed; but she did not sit down immediately. Instead she walked about in the dimmer atmosphere of the room, and he heard her sigh heavily. He felt pity for her, the more as she showed feeling for the first time to him. He waited, standing by the door open on the balcony, till she turned to him.

"Clara is wrong—she is mistaken," she said in a voice half-stifled. "There is no reason why she should not marry. She knows it is so—she talks of marriage—this is only a mood——"

"It is more than a mood—at least, it is one that she cannot get away from," he replied sombrely. "It is perpetually coming back—it seems to underlie all her moods—to be constantly in her mind——"

"She is wrong," Mrs. Langham repeated quickly. "There is no reason why she should not marry. There is no good reason—no chance—she—— Do you mean," she asked, turning on him, "that you fear to marry her?"



*“She walked about in the dimmer atmosphere of the room, and he heard her sigh heavily.”*



## *The Eternal Spring*

“ I would marry her to-morrow—even if I knew that what she fears is true, that the chances were against her. Even if I knew she was doomed I would fight it out with her——” He stopped. Mrs. Langham looked fixedly at him. He went on: “ But she—her feeling—you can see from her letter——”

“ Yes, but—but you must persuade her. This is a shadow—she is morbid—she cannot possibly be affected. It was long after her birth that—that her father—that he developed that disease. She could not—it could not affect her——”

Carleton pitied the agitated woman. She leaned against the piano, her hands turning over and rearranging a pile of music, her face hidden from him.

“ Forgive me,” he said gently. “ Believe me, I would not hurt you if I could help it. But I can’t help it. It means too much—to Clara—and to me. It may make the difference—it may change our whole lives—I may lose her——”

He stopped, unable for a moment to go on.

“ No, not if she cares for you——”

“ You can say so, after that letter? ”

## *The Eternal Spring*

“But you came back! You saw her last night——”

“Yes, I saw her, and she wept. She is suffering—she will always suffer—if this must go on. . . . She said what she says in the letter about the burden of it—her fear. And think! Even if she marries now she will never dare to have a child. Do you see—she says it must die with her——”

“She may be better off without children,” said Mrs. Langham with intense bitterness. “My child has not been much comfort to me.”

He ignored the last part of her speech. “But not with the feeling that they are unnaturally denied to her!” he cried. “Not with the feeling that she dare not!”

The silence lay hollow between them. Mrs. Langham at last raised her arms and let them fall heavily by her sides.

“This has gone far enough,” she said. “We cannot help it by talking. Clara must do her best. I have borne much more than she ever can. . . . My head . . . I must go and lie down. . . .”

“Not just yet,” implored Carleton. “I must

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ask you—I must know certain things. You see what it means to me. You must forgive me. I want you to read this, if you will.”

She took Crittenden’s letter from him and walked to the door to read it. He followed her, watching her face. It flushed and darkened with anger as she read that blunt, half-jocular comment on her story. Once she crumpled the letter and glanced at Carleton in rage.

“Crittenden — who is he?” she demanded harshly. “What has he to do with this?”

“A famous specialist. I wrote to him some time ago.”

“Oh, you wrote! . . . Why do you give me this? He says here just what I have been saying, exactly—that she should marry, that there is no chance——”

“Have you read it all—the last paragraph?”

She read that, and paused, and folded the letter mechanically.

“He says there is no chance—practically none,” she repeated darkly.

“*Practically!* That is just the point. There is a chance—one chance in a thousand, perhaps, but

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enough to darken her whole life, as it has done. I can't bear it! I must do what I can to save her. Can't you help me?"

She moved, turning her back to the light again.

"Help you? How can I? What can I do?"

"It is true, then, what Crittenden takes as the unlikely hypothesis—that this insanity existed—that Clara's father did die insane?"

"Certainly he did."

She raised her head and looked at him haughtily.

"You see what hangs on this—on your being sure," Carleton said slowly. "If you were mistaken, all this falls to the ground."

"I could not be mistaken."

She faced him, pale, breathing fast, looking, for all her high anger, like some creature hunted and turning to make a show of defence.

## CHAPTER XXIII

CARLETON looked at her with momentary despair; with determination hardening as he perceived the expected difficulty.

“Won’t you sit down—and listen to me?” he asked. “I can’t keep you standing——”

“I’m not well—I must go to my room,” she repeated. “I can’t—I can’t go on with this any longer.”

“But to-morrow you are going away—this is my last chance to see you. Surely, for Clara’s sake—! Surely you care for her happiness!”

“Of course I care for it! I care as much as anyone.”

“No, that’s impossible. You can’t care as much as I do, for I care more than all the world for her.”

“Yes—love! I know what it is!” She laughed bitterly. “You would do anything for her—sacrifice anything—so you think. But what it really

## *The Eternal Spring*

amounts to is that she must give up everything to you! I don't believe overmuch in love."

"You have had your life," he said. "Let her have hers."

"My life!" She threw back her head and laughed. "Yes, I have had it, truly! . . . My life ended many years ago—ended just as much as if I had succeeded in killing myself then, as I tried to do. Oh, yes, I tried! . . . And now you're bringing it all back to me. Is this kind? And I have never injured you—I have helped you as much as I could with Clara."

Carleton took her hands, drew her forward and put her gently into a chair. Her hands were cold, she shivered, and two red spots glowed on her cheeks. She looked haggard, old, and wretched. If she still stood on her defence it was in the fashion of a creature knowing its own weakness and expecting to be crushed. But she did resist. Carleton pressed on.

"Only one thing will help me with Clara," he said, still gently, his face, with all its kindness, showing the grim lines of resolution. "The truth!"

## *The Eternal Spring*

“The truth! But do you mean to say—do you think I——”

“I do think you have made a mistake, and have stood to it all these years, but that you can set it right. I think you were mistaken in your idea of insanity—everything points that way to me——”

“Everything? But what can you know about it? I am the one person who knows . . . and nothing can convince *me* that my husband was not insane. . . . I see what you mean about Clara—do you think I haven’t seen it before? But, I repeat, it can’t be of so much importance to her—it can’t really affect her. . . . And in any case it is true. . . . To shoot down an unarmed man, as he did, without a moment’s warning—then, like a coward, not to stand to his punishment, but to leave all to me!——”

She poured out the words in a strained voice, hardly above a whisper—sitting bolt upright in her chair, her hands clenched on the arms, her eyes flashing at Carleton. Then she collapsed—fell back in the chair, and covered her face with her hands.

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“ I know,” he murmured. “ You loved him—Malaspina.”

He could see her body vibrate to the sound. She moved her head slightly.

“ It killed me,” she said hollowly. “ I have been as good as dead since then. . . . It was the act of a madman—you can’t deny it! ”

“ No, I can’t deny it. It was a mad act—and cowardly. But men have been driven mad by jealousy, sometimes by groundless jealousy. There are plenty of Othellos—but Othello was not insane.”

“ What has Othello to do with it? . . . My life had been threatened before—I lived in daily fear of an outbreak. . . . Mal—Malaspina was urging me to leave him. . . . He had just gone out of my sitting-room—all was arranged for my leaving Mentone the next day—when——”

“ You were going to leave your husband, then? And he knew it, or suspected it? ”

“ He knew—that I was afraid of him. He watched me—he may have guessed that I intended——”

## *The Eternal Spring*

“Then it is clear enough—without any need of insanity for an explanation! He was jealous—you were arranging with Malaspina to leave him——”

“Not ‘with.’ He—Malaspina—helped me because he saw I was in danger——”

“Very well; but it comes to the same thing—or would, in the mind of a jealous man. But this ‘danger’—wasn’t that, too, connected with Malaspina? Your husband disliked Malaspina—wanted you to dismiss him—you refused—he threatened you——”

She looked at Carleton in dull astonishment.

“Yes, that’s true. He threatened me—and once—he struck me. It was then I made up my mind to go.”

“And this quarrel—this threat—were on account of Malaspina?”

“You ask . . .? Yes, they were. But he was unjust to me—all his violence—there was no reason——”

“No reason, perhaps—but some excuse for his jealousy. You admit there was some excuse. You didn’t care for him. You did love Malaspina.”

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She stared straight before her, and her breast rose and fell noiselessly again and again.

“Why am I talking to you like this? . . . I did love him. . . . Yes, I loved him. . . . I loved him. . . . And he was killed all in a moment . . . shot down . . . no chance to defend himself, to speak . . . .”

She sobbed tearlessly.

“Was that a thing for a sane man to do? And you ask me to believe that he was sane? You say that I had given him an excuse—a reason for what he did? . . . You are all cruel, you men, and blind! . . . You talk to me, and pretend to sympathise with me, and make me talk to you—and then you turn round on me and say that I am responsible! I am not—he was raving crazy—I will swear to it——”

She sprang to her feet, and Carleton rose, too.

“I can prove that he was not,” he said.

“You can prove——?”

“I have some evidence, and I can get more. I know that he had no hereditary taint; and you know that, too.”

## *The Eternal Spring*

“How do you know? You——”

“I have been making enquiries, of course, and I shall make a great many more before I admit your statement. I know that up to the time of your leaving Baltimore and coming abroad to live no one had ever suspected Mr. Langham of mental unsoundness. That’s true, isn’t it?”

“Well—if it is——?”

“I have expert opinion that homicidal mania does not develop without some hereditary taint, or illness, with well-defined symptoms, without some delusion. There was no hereditary taint in his case; there were no symptoms, except a possibly exaggerated jealousy; there was no delusion—for it wasn’t a delusion that you loved another man, and that you were ready to leave your husband. You’ve said it.”

Her face was set in bitter lines.

“You turn my confidence against me. I might have known it.”

“No. I am only trying to show you a way out of all this trouble.”

“A way out? What way?”

“Simply that you admit your error. You see——

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you must see—that you can't maintain it any longer. . . . I can understand well enough how you came to make it. You were distracted, you were crushed, your life had been ruined, you were in despair; you felt that this blow was unjust, that it was out of all proportion to what had caused it——”

“Yes—it was, it was,” she whispered.

“And you seized on the explanation that saved you from the load of blame—and no doubt it seemed to you the true one.”

“Yes.”

“For a long time it was not questioned openly—and you became accustomed to it, so that to have it questioned was like striking at you.”

“Yes.”

“And when it comes to the point that you see its terrible effect on other people—on the person who is nearest to you in the world—you instinctively cling to it, because you created it, and it seems almost like a part of you. And yet it's a delusion—it's false—you have deluded yourself and helped to delude others. It has no real life. You must help to take away the life you've given it. You

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must take your share of responsibility for what is past and gone."

She was silent. She put one hand on the piano-case for support. He could guess nothing from her face.

"See, it won't be hard," he said still more gently. "It would be infinitely harder for you to keep up the other thing. For you would have to prove your side against me. And I should fight!"

"Prove? Fight? How?"

"I would never leave you in peace. I'd follow you to the ends of the earth. You'd have to say it sooner or later."

"To say what? What would satisfy you?"

"To say what you did. What it was, in those last days at Mentone, that drove your husband to do what he did. . . . There is something you haven't told me."

His eyes, burning with the intensity of his will, fixed hers, and his voice, still gentle in tone, had a ring of hardness that came of his self-restraint.

"Tell me—it shall be known only to Clara."

"Clara!"

"She must know, of course. It's the only thing

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that will save her. You do it to save her from suffering."

"I've made her suffer, you say!"

"Yes, but you can end it."

"No—I can't end it. She will have all this to think of—as I've had. She—perhaps she won't care less for me, for she never cared for me, but——"

"I'll take her away. She will have a new life, new interests. She'll forget—at least, it will be past——"

"Yes, that's best. Take her away. . . . I don't know why you're waiting now. Haven't you tormented me enough?"

"I want you only to tell me—what you haven't yet told me."

"I will tell you—and then you'll leave me in peace?"

"I hope so."

"Then I'll tell you—though it's not such a tremendous thing. . . . Langham knew that I was going to leave him—we had a fearful quarrel about it—he could not bear that I should separate from him——"

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“ For Malaspina? ”

“ Yes . . . yes . . . And I could not get a divorce . . . he could not marry a divorced woman . . . Giulio . . . but I was going. . . . Now, go—leave me alone.”

She began to sob, and put her handkerchief to her face.

“ That’s enough . . . I’ll tell Clara. And you—will you tell her that I—am to——”

“ Ah, she’ll believe! . . . ”

“ But you’ll speak to her—you’ll say something——”

“ I’ll write it to her. And then I want not to see her for—for a time—a year, two years—I don’t know when I can see her!—Elizabeth will take her—and you, she marries you—— But be sure——” She made a step forward and seized Carleton’s arm in a fierce grasp. “ Be sure that she loves you! It won’t do for you only to love her! . . . Be sure that she loves you! I shall write that to her. . . . ‘ Be sure that you love him, or you may go to wreck and ruin!’ . . . ”

She caught her breath, released him, pushed him away.

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“ There, go! . . . And you can write to me. Tell me if you are happy. . . . If not, don't write. . . . Good-bye! ”

She turned from him with a whirl and flare of her purple draperies; and putting her hands to her head, clasping the waves of black hair, burying her fingers in them, she rushed from the room.

## CHAPTER XXIV

**T**O the tumult of the next day quiet succeeded—a quiet that seemed strange and at first was hardly realised. Mrs. Langham had departed; the Contessa and Francesca were installed in Clara's house. Clara had given her consent to go to England, and Carleton had sent a wire to Elizabeth, with some wonder at the fate that was to give Clara to him from Elizabeth's hands. He began to breathe again. But one and all of this small group of people that had been shaken by the storm now past moved as yet in a hushed fashion, and drew their breath in pain. The harshness of the world, its chances, its judgments, had touched them too nearly for any present rejoicing.

The one whom it touched most nearly was watched by the other three with solicitude in proportion to their feeling for her. Her quiet, her grave face, and wish for solitude, were natural

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enough, and they let her alone. She went about among them, talked a little about the trivial matters of the day, and said nothing about what was in the minds of all. The short letter left for her by her mother, and Carleton's careful explanation, she had taken almost in silence. Gravely and unemotionally she had agreed with him that it was best to go to England and to be married early in September, less than a month away. They had discussed various plans for "afterwards." Carleton suggested America for a year to begin with, and she agreed to that also. He offered to go in for any kind of life that she thought would interest her. If she wanted more money, he thought he could get it for her. She smiled, and said she could tell better after a year's trial as they were.

Her piano remained closed. She was completely inexpressive and quite idle. She wanted to be always out of doors, and would walk by the hour, with Carleton or Francesca, almost in silence. If she was asked what she was thinking about, she smiled and said she wasn't thinking at all. Carleton, watching her, thought she was like some delicate plant that had been crushed down by a chance

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footstep, and was slowly raising its bruised leaves again. She seemed to him like the sensitive grass he had seen in the East which shrank away from him as he approached, before he had come near enough to touch it.

She did shrink from him in the first few days after Mrs. Langham's departure. He saw that she feared any show of emotion. She wanted to be perfectly quiet. And when he met her wish she rewarded him by drawing near him again, not in speech, or caress, or look, but in spirit subtly; so that he felt her confidence in him once more complete, and could wait patiently for the rest.

Day by day she gave him more. Slowly she emerged from her retreat, cautiously raised her head. She was to go to England with Lucie in ten days' time. Carleton had wanted to travel with her, but she said that in view of Elizabeth's kindness they must do in every way as she had suggested, and Carleton reluctantly acquiesced.

"She is very good," Clara had then said dreamily. "What should I do if she had not offered to take me in? You would have had to marry me out of the street almost!"

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“My dearest child!” he cried.

“She is very good to me,” she went on, unheeding him, “and all the more when you think what I did. I took you away from her. Yes . . . don’t try to deny it. . . . I did. . . . And I’m not sorry, either! I’m sorry for her—for she did care for you, Barry. But I’m glad I robbed her!”

To this glimpse of Clara’s enchanting self he responded in joy, that instantly she made him restrain.

“You’re good to me, too,” she said softly, her eyes making their pure appeal of trust in him. She took his hand in both hers and put it against her cheek, a grave yet childlike caress.

That she did trust him perfectly each new expression of her feeling showed. He saw with a strange mingling of acute pain and pleasure that she turned to him alone now out of all the world. She clung to him. So should it be, so and no otherwise would he have it, and yet the feeling of her loneliness hurt him. That *she* felt it, and made her mute appeal to him out of it, and leaned to him with submissive softness, like a friendless child,

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moved him so much that perhaps it was more pain than anything else. Yet when she showed her physical nearness to him, when her hand rested in his, as she chose it to do more and more constantly when they were alone together; when she leaned against his shoulder or clung to his arm, joy made all else forgotten. Her caresses were shy; and it seemed to him that he could not be too gentle with her. The breath of a kiss on her temple, her cheek, her hair, he ventured now and then. She set the note and set it to this pitch.

The days slipped by, and she began to show a soft regret at leaving this nook among the hills, and perhaps at interrupting their quiet companionship, the reticence of which had its own peculiar charm. It was the still pause of the full stream before the leap. She faced the leap calmly, yet showed some desire to linger on these last hours.

Signs of change were over all the country about them. The autumnal ripening was advanced, the gathering of the hill harvests begun. Autumnal gold everywhere lightened the deep green of summer. The chestnuts caught a golden glimmer on the spines of their full burrs, the grape-vines ran

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everywhere in lines of gold. Fields shorn of their crops showed yellow stubble, and the mounds of shining hay grew higher and higher. The voices of the streams had sunk to a minor note, the rivers ran in diminished volume through their pebble-beds. The whirr of the locusts sounded a perpetual drowsy undertone; small, vivid green snakes swarmed in the grass and on the roads; crowds of white butterflies danced in the sun. The sky took on a deeper, more purple tinge, the nights grew colder, and a warning chill breathed from the woodland depths.

One afternoon, almost the last they were to have here together, they had come back from a long walk through the forest, and paused at a spot above the hotel to watch the setting of the evening star. The place was a small, grassy terrace, walled with stone, and called *Due Fontane* from two springs that gushed out through the wall into a stone basin. From it they looked down into the valley, where the stream caught a line of light from the clear sky, and over innumerable hill-slopes, some coloured by the sunset, some deep in shadow, all

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painted mysteriously by the gathering veils of twilight folds of blue vapour rising and drifting across them. The smell of wood-smoke was in the air, sweet with all the sweetness of the earth that has peacefully yielded its harvest and is left to repose.

The large star hung in the west, above the shoulder of the dark, wooded hill, its light almost lost for a time in the radiance of the sky, but every moment shining out more clearly.

Clara sat on the wall, Carleton stood beside her, his arm half encircling her, and she leaned lightly against his shoulder. Their day had been a happy one. She had been content, almost gay, again. She had sung, for the first time in weeks; and now she was humming over the melody that she had set to the Dirge in "Cymbeline":

"Fear no more the heat o' the sun,  
Nor the furious winter's rages!"

It had a quiet, lulling sweetness that suited her mood and the mood of the evening. Her eyes reflected the clear and peaceful light of the west as she looked dreamily over the valley; she had the listening look that showed her deep pleasure in

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all this beauty of line, and colour, and murmuring sound. In her hand was a bunch of scarlet flowers, pulled from a deserted garden they had passed, and she had put one flower in the black knot of her hair, just behind her ear. Carleton gazed and gazed at her, moving slightly a little away from her, to see her the better.

“What are you looking at?” she asked.

“I don’t know,” he answered. “At a mystery—you.”

“Am I a mystery? Why?”

“I can’t tell you why. Can you tell me why you’re so beautiful?”

“I’m not beautiful. I have only an effect of beauty now and then. But I hypnotise people into thinking I am, because I want so much to be thought so. I am frightfully vain!”

“You have bewitched me, then. I thought so, when I first felt your spell.”

“Tell me what you thought of me, just at first! Do you know what I thought of you?”

“No—tell me. I can bear it now.”

“I should think you might. I thought you amazingly good-looking!”



*“Do you think we’re too happy?”, she asked after a moment in a hushed voice.”*



## *The Eternal Spring*

“Good heavens! Why?”

“Why? Because you looked so strong and quiet——”

“Oh, it was moral beauty, then, that you saw in me? You must have been thinking Whitman: ‘I could turn and live with animals, they are so placid and self-contained—not one is respectable or unhappy over the whole earth——!’”

Clara struck his cheek with her bunch of flowers, and his arm went round her again and drew her close.

“You must always like me as much as you do now,” she said.

“Never fear—I shall like you too much.”

“But it must be for always! Love me little, love me long!”

“For always.”

“Why do I believe everything you say? I never felt so to anyone before—but it seems to me you are true as steel and clear as the sunlight! Your eyes are so honest—dear blue eyes! You never deceived anyone or hurt anyone, did you?  
. . . I love you!”

She threw her arms round his neck and put her

## *The Eternal Spring*

face against his cheek. Barry held her close. She felt his breast tremble; a tear rolled down his cheek and touched hers.

She started, and moved a little away from him.

“Do you think we’re too happy?” she asked after a moment in a hushed voice. “Perhaps something will happen to us—we shall have to pay for it. I’m a pagan, you know, and I fear the gods. I think they’re jealous gods. Shall we sacrifice something to them?”

“Don’t, Clara, dearest! This happiness is ours—it can’t be taken from us!”

“Ah, yes, it can! How easily they could take it! I’m afraid of them, I tell you . . .”

She was silent, and he.

But the silence and his clasp of her were eloquent—eloquent of the deep current that moved these straws of speech. Clara felt it, swayed to it and to him, to his kiss. . . .

Then she drew herself away, and with warm eyes and lips put the space of words between them.

“How beautiful the world is!” she murmured vaguely, passionately. “How beautiful! And how sad—the tragedy of it, the tragedy of life!”

## *The Eternal Spring*

Her voice was tragic and shaken; but it trembled not from the feeling of the tragedy of life. The deep current ran and murmured in the hearts of both. Its music was joy, hope, the song of youth and love.

“Beautiful!” he said. “Life is anything you may say of it . . . everything. . . . Look, Clara, see the star there! See how the shoulder of the earth swings up to it! . . . Can’t you feel the earth turn as you look?”

Cheek to cheek they watched the dark, wooded line of the hill rise nearer and nearer to the star.

“How small we are! What a pair of tiny atoms!” murmured Clara. “And all this vastness about us! . . . And yet we live and are happy, and nothing else seems to matter . . .”

The dark line touched the star. It sparkled for a moment through the dotted row of trees; it was gone. Their eyes dwelt on the spot where a moment since it had seemed to be; glowing with the light that has lit all happy lovers’ eyes, looking on the fair earth or heaven, since the world began.

Books by Neith Boyce

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## Books by Neith Boyce

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"It is a genuine pleasure, once in a while, to come across such a sincere, frank, and convincing study of married life as we find in this story of *The Forerunner*. Few first novels have the quality of this book, the clear grasp of personalities, the definite and sustained purpose."—*Globe and Commercial Advertiser*, New York.

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## Books by Neith Boyce

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