

**GEORGE
GISSING**

WILL

WARBURTON

George Gissing
Will Warburton

«Public Domain»

Gissing G.

Will Warburton / G. Gissing — «Public Domain»,

Содержание

CHAPTER 1	5
CHAPTER 2	7
CHAPTER 3	10
CHAPTER 4	13
CHAPTER 5	16
CHAPTER 6	17
CHAPTER 7	19
CHAPTER 8	21
CHAPTER 9	24
CHAPTER 10	29
CHAPTER 11	31
CHAPTER 12	34
CHAPTER 13	38
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	40

George Gissing

Will Warburton

CHAPTER 1

The sea-wind in his hair, his eyes agleam with the fresh memory of Alpine snows, Will Warburton sprang out of the cab, paid the driver a double fare, flung on to his shoulder a heavy bag and ran up, two steps at a stride, to a flat on the fourth floor of the many-tenanted building hard by Chelsea Bridge. His rat-tat-tat brought to the door a thin yellow face, cautious in espial, through the narrow opening.

"Is it you, sir?"

"All right, Mrs. Hopper! How are you?—how are you?"

He threw his bag into the passage, and cordially grasped the woman's hands.

"Dinner ready? Savagely hungry. Give me three minutes, and serve."

For about that length of time there sounded in the bedroom a splashing and a blowing; then Warburton came forth with red cheeks. He seized upon a little pile of letters and packets which lay on his writing-table, broke envelopes, rent wrappers, and read with now an ejaculation of pleasure, now a grunt of disgust, and again a mirthful half roar. Then, dinner—the feeding of a famished man of robust appetite and digestion, a man three or four years on the green side of thirty. It was a speedy business, in not much more than a quarter of an hour there disappeared a noble steak and its appurtenances, a golden-crust ed apple tart, a substantial slice of ripe Cheddar, two bottles of creamy Bass.

"Now I can talk!" cried Will to his servant, as he threw himself into a deep chair, and began lighting his pipe. "What's the news? I seem to have been away three months rather than three weeks."

"Mr. Franks called yesterday, sir, late in the afternoon, when I was here cleaning. He was very glad to hear you'd be back to-day, and said he might look in to-night."

"Good! What else?"

"My brother-in-law wishes to see you, sir. He's in trouble again—lost his place at Boxon's a few days ago. I don't exac'ly know how it happened, but he'll explain everything. He's very unfortunate, sir, is Allchin."

"Tell him to come before nine to-morrow morning, if he can."

"Yes, sir. I'm sure it's very kind of you, sir."

"What else?"

"Nothing as I can think of just now, sir."

Warburton knew from the woman's way of speaking that she had something still in her mind; but his pipe being well lit, and a pleasant lassitude creeping over him, he merely nodded. Mrs. Hopper cleared the table, and withdrew.

The window looked across the gardens of Chelsea Hospital (old-time Ranelagh) to the westward reach of the river, beyond which lay Battersea Park, with its lawns and foliage. A beam of the July sunset struck suddenly through the room. Warburton was aware of it with half-closed eyes; he wished to stir himself, and look forth, but languor held his limbs, and wreathing tobacco-smoke kept his thoughts among the mountains. He might have quite dozed off had not a sudden noise from within aroused him—the unmistakable crash of falling crockery. It made him laugh, a laugh of humorous expostulation. A minute or two passed, then came a timid tap at his door, and Mrs. Hopper showed her face.

"Another accident, sir, I'm sorry to say," were her faltering words.

"Extensive?"

"A dish and two plates, I'm sorry to say, sir."

"Oh, that's nothing."

"Of course I shall make them good, sir."

"Pooh! Aren't there plates enough?"

"Oh, quite enough—just yet, sir."

Warburton subdued a chuckle, and looked with friendly smile at his domestic, who stood squeezing herself between the edge of the door and the jamb—her habit when embarrassed. Mrs. Hopper had served him for three years; he knew all her weaknesses, but thought more of her virtues, chief of which were honest intention and a moderate aptitude for plain cooking. A glance about this room would have proved to any visitor that Mrs. Hopper's ideas of cleanliness were by no means rigid, her master had made himself to a certain extent responsible for this defect; he paid little attention to dust, provided that things were in their wonted order. Mrs. Hopper was not a resident domestic; she came at stated hours. Obviously a widow, she had a poor, loose-hung, trailing little body, which no nourishment could plump or fortify. Her visage was habitually doleful, but contracted itself at moments into a grin of quaint drollery, which betrayed her for something of a humorist.

"My fingers is all gone silly to-day, sir," she pursued. "I daresay it's because I haven't had much sleep these last few nights."

"How's that?"

"It's my poor sister, sir—my sister Liza, I mean—she's had one of her worst headaches—the extra special, we call 'em. This time it's lasted more than three days, and not one minute of rest has the poor thing got."

Warburton was all sympathy; he inquired about the case as though it were that of an intimate friend. Change of air and repose were obvious remedies; no less obviously, these things were out of the question for a working woman who lived on a few shillings a week.

"Do you know of any place she could go to?" asked Warburton, adding carelessly, "if the means were provided."

Mrs. Hopper squeezed herself more tightly than ever between door and jamb. Her head was bent in an abashed way, and when she spoke it was in a thick, gurgling tone, only just intelligible.

"There's a little lodging 'ouse at Southend, sir, where we used to go when my 'usband could afford it."

"Well, look here. Get a doctor's opinion whether Southend would do; if not, which place would. And just send her away. Don't worry about the money."

Experience enabled Mrs. Hopper to interpret this advice. She stammered gratitude.

"How's your other sister—Mrs. Allchin?" Warburton inquired kindly.

"Why, sir, she's doing pretty well in her 'ealth, sir, but her baby died yesterday week. I hope you'll excuse me, sir, for all this bad news just when you come back from your holiday, and when it's natural as you don't feel in very good spirits."

Will had much ado not to laugh. On his return from a holiday, Mrs. Hopper always presumed him to be despondent in view of the resumption of daily work. He was beginning to talk of Mrs. Allchin's troubles, when at the outer door sounded a long nervous knock.

"Ha! That's Mr. Franks."

Mrs. Hopper ran to admit the visitor.

CHAPTER 2

"Warburton!" cried a high-pitched voice from the passage. "Have you seen *The Art World*?"

And there rushed into the room a tall, auburn-headed young man of five-and-twenty, his comely face glowing in excitement. With one hand he grasped his friend's, in the other he held out a magazine.

"You haven't seen it! Look here! What d'you think of that, confound you!"

He had opened the magazine so as to display an illustration, entitled "Sanctuary," and stated to be after a painting by Norbert Franks.

"Isn't it good? Doesn't it come out well?—deuce take you, why don't you speak?"

"Not bad—for a photogravure," said Warburton, who had the air of a grave elder in the presence of this ebullient youth.

"Be hanged! We know all about that. The thing is that it's *there*. Don't you feel any surprise? Haven't you got anything to say? Don't you see what this means, you old ragamuffin?"

"Shouldn't wonder if it meant coin of the realm—for your shrewd dealer."

"For me too, my boy, for me too! Not out of this thing, of course. But I've arrived, I'm *lance*, the way is clear! Why, you don't seem to know what it means getting into *The Art World*."

"I seem to remember," said Warburton, smiling, "that a month or two ago, you hadn't language contemptuous enough for this magazine and all connected with it."

"Don't be an ass!" shrilled the other, who was all this time circling about the little room with much gesticulation. "Of course one talks like that when one hasn't enough to eat and can't sell a picture. I don't pretend to have altered my opinion about photogravures, and all that. But come now, the thing itself? Be honest, Warburton. Is it bad, now? Can you look at that picture, and say that it's worthless?"

"I never said anything of the kind."

"No, no! You're too deucedly good-natured. But I always detected what you were thinking, and I saw it didn't surprise you at all when the Academy muffs refused it."

"There you're wrong," cried Warburton. "I was really surprised."

"Confound your impudence! Well, you may think what you like. I maintain that the thing isn't half bad. It grows upon me. I see its merits more and more."

Franks was holding up the picture, eyeing it intently. "Sanctuary" represented the interior of an old village church. On the ground against a pillar, crouched a young and beautiful woman, her dress and general aspect indicating the last degree of vagrant wretchedness; worn out, she had fallen asleep in a most graceful attitude, and the rays of a winter sunset smote upon her pallid countenance. Before her stood the village clergyman, who had evidently just entered, and found her here; his white head was bent in the wonted attitude of clerical benevolence; in his face blended a gentle wonder and a compassionate tenderness.

"If that had been hung at Burlington House, Warburton, it would have been the picture of the year."

"I think it very likely."

"Yes, I know what you mean, you sarcastic old ruffian. But there's another point of view. Is the drawing good or not? Is the colour good or not? Of course you know nothing about it, but I tell you, for your information, I think it's a confoundedly clever bit of work. There remains the subject, and where's the harm in it? The incident's quite possible. And why shouldn't the girl be good-looking?"

"Angelic!"

"Well why not? There *are* girls with angelic faces. Don't I know one?"

Warburton, who had been sitting with a leg over the arm of his chair suddenly changed his position.

"That reminds me," he said. "I came across the Pomfrets in Switzerland."

"Where? When?"

"At Trient ten days ago. I spent three or four days with them. Hasn't Miss Elvan mentioned it?"

"I haven't heard from her for a long time," replied Franks. "Well, for more than a week. Did you meet them by chance?"

"Quite. I had a vague idea that the Pomfrets and their niece were somewhere in Switzerland."

"Vague idea!" cried the artist "Why, I told you all about it, and growled for five or six hours one evening here because I couldn't go with them."

"So you did," said Warburton, "but I'm afraid I was thinking of something else, and when I started for the Alps, I had really forgotten all about it. I made up my mind suddenly, you know. We're having a troublesome time in Ailie Street, and it was holiday now or never. By the bye, we shall have to wind up. Sugar spells ruin. We must get out of it whilst we can do so with a whole skin."

"Ah, really?" muttered Franks. "Tell me about that presently; I want to hear of Rosamund. You saw a good deal of her, of course?"

"I walked from Chamonix over the Col de Balme—grand view of Mont Blanc there! Then down to Trient, in the valley below. And there, as I went in to dinner at the hotel, I found the three. Good old Pomfret would have me stay awhile, and I was glad of the chance of long talks with him. Queer old bird, Ralph Pomfret."

"Yes, yes, so he is," muttered the artist, absently. "But Rosamund—was she enjoying herself?"

"Very much, I think. She certainly looked very well."

"Have much talk with her?" asked Franks, as if carelessly.

"We discussed you, of course. I forget whether our conclusion was favourable or not."

The artist laughed, and strode about the room with his hands in his pockets.

"You know what?" he exclaimed, seeming to look closely at a print on the wall. "I'm going to be married before the end of the year. On that point I've made up my mind. I went yesterday to see a house at Fulham—Mrs. Cross's, by the bye, it's to let at Michaelmas, rent forty-five. All but settled that I shall take it. Risk be hanged. I'm going to make money. What an ass I was to take that fellow's first offer for 'Sanctuary'! It was low water with me, and I felt bilious. Fifty guineas! Your fault, a good deal, you know; you made me think worse of it than it deserved. You'll see; Blackstaffe'll make a small fortune out of it; of course he has all the rights—idiot that I was! Well, it's too late to talk about that.—And I say, old man, don't take my growl too literally. I don't really mean that you were to blame. I should be an ungrateful cur if I thought such a thing."

"How's 'The Slummer' getting on?" asked Warburton good-humouredly.

"Well, I was going to say that I shall have it finished in a few weeks. If Blackstaffe wants 'The Slummer' he'll have to pay for it. Of course it must go to the Academy, and of course I shall keep all the rights—unless Blackstaffe makes a really handsome offer. Why, it ought to be worth five or six hundred to me at least. And that would start us. But I don't care even if I only get half that, I shall be married all the same. Rosamund has plenty of pluck. I couldn't ask her to start life on a pound a week—about my average for the last two years; but with two or three hundred in hand, and a decent little house, like that of Mrs. Cross's, at a reasonable rent—well, we shall risk it. I'm sick of waiting. And it isn't fair to a girl—that's my view. Two years now; an engagement that lasts more than two years isn't likely to come to much good. You'll think my behaviour pretty cool, on one point. I don't forget, you old usurer, that I owe you something more than a hundred pounds—"

"Pooh!"

"Be poohed yourself! But for you, I should have gone without dinner many a day; but for you, I should most likely have had to chuck painting altogether, and turn clerk or dock-labourer. But let me stay in your debt a little longer, old man. I can't put off my marriage any longer, and just at first I shall want all the money I can lay my hands on."

At this moment Mrs. Hopper entered with a lamp. There was a pause in the conversation. Franks lit a cigarette, and tried to sit still, but was very soon pacing the floor again. A tumbler of whisky and soda reanimated his flagging talk.

"No!" he exclaimed. "I'm not going to admit that 'Sanctuary' is cheap and sentimental, and all the rest of it. The more I think about it, the more convinced I am that it's nothing to be ashamed of. People have got hold of the idea that if a thing is popular it must be bad art. That's all rot. I'm going in for popularity. Look here! Suppose that's what I was meant for? What if it's the best I have in me to do? Shouldn't I be a jackass if I scorned to make money by what, for me, was good work, and preferred to starve whilst I turned out pretentious stuff that was worth nothing from my point of view?"

"I shouldn't wonder if you're right," said Warburton reflectively. "In any case, I know as much about art as I do about the differential calculus. To make money is a good and joyful thing as long as one doesn't bleed the poor. So go ahead, my son, and luck be with you!"

"I can't find my model yet for the Slummer's head. It mustn't be too like the 'Sanctuary' girl, but at the same time it must be a popular type of beauty. I've been haunting refreshment bars and florists' shops; lots of good material, but never *quite* the thing. There's a damsel at the Crystal Palace—but this doesn't interest you, you old misogynist."

"Old what?" exclaimed Warburton, with an air of genuine surprise.

"Have I got the word wrong? I'm not much of a classic—"

"The word's all right. But that's your idea of me, is it?"

The artist stood and gazed at his friend with an odd expression, as if a joke had been arrested on his lips by graver thought.

"Isn't it true?"

"Perhaps it is; yes, yes, I daresay."

And he turned at once to another subject.

CHAPTER 3

The year was 1886.

When at business, Warburton sat in a high, bare room, which looked upon little Ailie Street, in Whitechapel; the air he breathed had a taste and odour strongly saccharine. If his eye strayed to one of the walls, he saw a map of the West Indies; if to another, it fell upon a map of St. Kitts; if to the third, there was before him a plan of a sugar estate on that little island. Here he sat for certain hours of the solid day, issuing orders to clerks, receiving commercial callers, studying trade journals in sundry languages—often reading some book which had no obvious reference to the sugar-refining industry. It was not Will's ideal of life, but hither he had suffered himself to be led by circumstance, and his musings suggested no practicable issue into a more congenial world.

The death of his father when he was sixteen had left him with a certain liberty for shaping a career. What he saw definitely before him was a small share in the St. Kitts property of Messrs. Sherwood Brothers, a small share in the London business of the same firm, and a small sum of ready money—these things to be his when he attained his majority. His mother and sister, who lived in a little country house down in Huntingdonshire, were modestly but securely provided for, and Will might have gone quietly on with his studies till he could resolve upon a course in life. But no sooner was he freed from paternal restraint than the lad grew restive; nothing would please him but an adventure in foreign lands; and when it became clear that he was only wasting his time at school, Mrs. Warburton let him go to the West Indies, where a place was found for him in the house of Sherwood Brothers. At St. Kitts, Will remained till he was one-and-twenty. Long before that, he had grown heartily tired of his work disgusted with the climate, and oppressed with home sickness, but pride forbade him to return until he could do so as a free man.

One thing this apprenticeship to life had taught him—that he was not made for subordination. "I don't care how poor I am," thus he wrote to his mother, "but I will be my own master. To be at other people's orders brings out all the bad in me; it makes me sullen and bearish, and all sorts of ugly things, which I certainly am not when my true self has play. So, you see, I must find some independent way of life. If I had to live by carrying round a Punch and Judy show, I should vastly prefer it to making a large income as somebody's servant."

Meanwhile, unfortunately for a young man of this temperament, his prospects had become less assured. There was perturbation in the sugar world; income from St. Kitts and from Whitechapel had sensibly diminished, and it seemed but too likely, would continue to do so. For some half-year Will lived in London, "looking about him," then he announced that Godfrey Sherwood, at present sole representative of Sherwood Brothers, had offered him an active partnership in Little Ailie Street, and that he had accepted it. He entered upon this position without zeal, but six months' investigation had taught him that to earn money without surrendering his independence was no very easy thing; he probably might wait a long time before an opening would present itself more attractive than this at the sugar-refinery.

Godfrey Sherwood was a schoolfellow of his, but some two or three years older; much good feeling existed between them, their tastes and tempers having just that difference in similarity which is the surest bond of friendship. Judged by his talk, Sherwood was all vigour, energy, fire; his personal habits, on the other hand, inclined to tranquillity and ease—a great reader, he loved the literature of romance and adventure, knew by heart authors such as Malory and Froissart, had on his shelves all the books of travel and adventure he could procure. As a boy he seemed destined to any life save that of humdrum commerce, of which he spoke with contempt and abhorrence; and there was no reason why he should not have gratified his desire of seeing the world, of leading what he called "the life of a man." Yet here he was, sitting each day in a counting-house in Whitechapel, with nothing behind him but a few rambles on the continent, and certainly with no immediate intention of going far afield. His

father's death left him in sole command of the business, and his reasonable course would have been to retire from it as soon as possible, for foreign competition was making itself felt in the English trade, and many firms more solidly established than that in Little Ailie Street had either come to grief or withdrawn from the struggle. But Godfrey's inertia kept him in the familiar routine, with day-to-day postponement of practical decision. When Warburton came back from St. Kitts, and their friendship was renewed, Godfrey's talk gave full play to his imaginative energies. Yes, yes, the refining business was at a bad pass just now, but this was only temporary; those firms that could weather the storm for a year or two longer would enter upon a time of brilliant prosperity. Was it to be supposed that the Government would allow a great industry to perish out of mere regard for the fetish of Free Trade? City men with first-hand information declared that "measures" were being prepared; in one way or another, the English trade would be rescued and made triumphant over those bounty-fed foreigners.

"Hold on?" cried Sherwood. "Of course I mean to hold on. There's pleasure and honour in the thing. I enjoy the fight. I've had thoughts of getting into Parliament, to speak for sugar. One might do worse, you know. There'll be a dissolution next year, certain. First-rate fun, fighting a constituency. But in that case I must have a partner here—why that's an idea. How would it suit you? Why not join me?"

And so the thing came about. The terms which Godfrey offered were so generous that Will had to reduce them before he accepted: even thus, he found his income, at a stroke, all but doubled. Sherwood, to be sure, did not stand for Parliament, nor was anything definite heard about that sugar-protecting budget which he still believed in. In Little Ailie Street business steadily declined.

"It's a disgrace to England!" cried Godfrey. "Monstrous that not a finger should be lifted to save one of our most important industries. You, of course, are free to retire at any moment, Will. For my own part, here I stand, come what may. If it's ruin, ruin let it be. I'll fight to the last. A man owes me ten thousand pounds. When I recover it, and I may any day—I shall put every penny into the business."

"Ten thousand pounds!" exclaimed Warburton in astonishment. "A trade debt, do you mean?"

"No, no. A friend of mine, son of a millionaire, who got into difficulties some time ago, and borrowed of me to clear himself. Good interest, and principal safe as Consols. In a year at most I shall have the money back, and every penny shall go into the business."

Will had his private view of the matter, and not seldom suffered a good deal of uneasiness as he saw the inevitable doom approach. But already it was too late to withdraw his share from the concern; that would have been merely to take advantage of Sherwood's generosity, and Will was himself not less chivalrous. In Godfrey's phrase, they continued "to fight the ship," and perhaps would have held out to the moment of sinking, had not the accession of the Liberals to power in the spring of this present year caused Sherwood so deep a disgust that he turned despondent and began to talk of surrender to hopeless circumstance.

"It's all up with us, Will. This Government spells ruin, and will count it one of its chief glories if we come to grief. But, by Heaven, they shan't have that joy. We'll square up, quietly, comfortably, with dignity. We'll come out of this fight with arms and baggage. It's still possible, you know. We'll sell the St. Kitts estate to the Germans. We'll find some one to buy us up here—the place would suit a brewer. And then—by Jove! we'll make jam."

"Jam?"

"Isn't it an idea? Cheap sugar has done for the refiners, but it's a fortune for the jam trade. Why not put all we can realize into a jam factory? We'll go down into the country; find some delightful place where land is cheap; start a fruit farm; run up a building. Doesn't it take you, Will? Think of going to business every day through lanes overhung with fruit-tree blossoms! Better that than the filth and stench and gloom and uproar of Whitechapel—what? We might found a village for our workpeople—the ideal village, perfectly healthy, every cottage beautiful. Eh? What? How does it strike you, Will?"

"Pleasant. But the money?"

"We shall have enough to start; I think we shall. If not, we'll find a moneyed man to join us."

"What about that ten thousand pounds?" suggested Warburton.

Sherwood shook his head.

"Can't get it just yet. To tell you the truth, it depends on the death of the man's father. No, but if necessary, some one will easily be found. Isn't the idea magnificent? How it would rile the Government if they heard of it! Ho, ho!"

One could never be sure how far Godfrey was serious when he talked like this; the humorous impulse so blended with the excitability of his imagination, that people who knew him little and heard him talking at large thought him something of a crack-brain. The odd thing was that, with all his peculiarities, he had many of the characteristics of a sound man of business; indeed, had it been otherwise, the balance-sheets of the refinery must long ago have shown a disastrous deficit. As Warburton knew, things had been managed with no little prudence and sagacity; what he did not so clearly understand was that Sherwood had simply adhered to the traditions of the firm, following very exactly the path marked out for him by his father and his uncle, both notable traders. Concerning Godfrey's private resources, Warburton knew little or nothing; it seemed probable that the elder Sherwood had left a considerable fortune, which his only son must have inherited. No doubt, said Will to himself, this large reserve was the explanation of his partner's courage.

So the St. Kitts estate was sold, and, with all the deliberate dignity demanded by the fact that the Government's eye was upon them, Sherwood Brothers proceeded to terminate their affairs in Whitechapel. In July, Warburton took his three weeks' holiday, there being nothing better for him to do. And among the letters he found on his table when he returned, was one from Sherwood, which contained only these words:

"Great opportunity in view. Our fortunes are made!"

CHAPTER 4

When Franks was gone, Warburton took up *The Art World*, which his friend had left, and glanced again at the photogravure of "Sanctuary." He knew, as he had declared, nothing about art, and judged pictures as he judged books, emotionally. His bent was to what is called the realistic point of view, and "Sanctuary" made him smile. But very good-naturedly; for he liked Norbert Franks, and believed he would do better things than this. Unless—?

The thought broke off with an uneasy interrogative.

He turned to the few lines of text devoted to the painter. Norbert Franks, he read, was still a very young man; "Sanctuary," now on exhibition at Birmingham, was his first important picture; hitherto he had been chiefly occupied with work in black and white. There followed a few critical comments, and prophecy of achievements to come.

Yes. But again the uneasy interrogative.

Their acquaintance dated from the year after Warburton's return from St. Kitts. Will had just established himself in his flat near Chelsea Bridge, delighted to be a Londoner, and was spending most of his leisure in exploration of London's vastness. He looked upon all his earlier years as wasted, because they had not been passed in the city on the Thames. The history of London, the multitudinous life of London as it lay about him, with marvels and mysteries in every highway and byway, occupied his mind, and wrought upon his imagination. Being a stout walker, and caring little for any other form of exercise, in his free hours he covered many a league of pavement. A fine summer morning would see him set forth, long before milk-carts had begun to rattle along the streets, and on one such expedition, as he stepped briskly through a poor district south of the river, he was surprised to see an artist at work, painting seriously, his easel in the dry gutter. He slackened his pace to have a glimpse of the canvas, and the painter, a young, pleasant-looking fellow, turned round and asked if he had a match. Able to supply this demand, Warburton talked whilst the other relit his pipe. It rejoiced him, he said, to see a painter engaged upon such a subject as this—a bit of squalid London's infinite picturesqueness.

The next morning Warburton took the same walk, and again found the painter at work. They talked freely; they exchanged invitations; and that same evening Norbert Franks climbed the staircase to Will's flat, and smoked his first pipe and drank his first whisky-and-soda in the pleasant room overlooking Ranelagh. His own quarters were in Queen's Road, Battersea, at no great distance. The two young men were soon seeing a great deal of each other. When their friendship had ripened through a twelvemonth, Franks, always impecunious, cheerily borrowed a five-pound note; not long after, he mirthfully doubled his debt; and this grew to a habit with him.

"You're a capitalist, Warburton," he remarked one day, "and a generous fellow, too. Of course I shall pay what I owe you when I sell a big picture. Meanwhile, you have the gratification of supporting a man of genius, without the least inconvenience to yourself. Excellent idea of yours to strike up a friendship, wasn't it?"

The benefit was reciprocal. Warburton did not readily form intimacies; indeed Godfrey Sherwood had till now been almost the only man he called friend, and the peculiarity of his temper exposed him to the risk of being too much alone. Though neither arrogant nor envious, Will found little pleasure in the society of people who, from any point of view, were notably his superiors; even as he could not subordinate himself in money-earning relations, so did he become ill-at-ease, lose all spontaneity, in company above his social or intellectual level. Such a man's danger was obvious; he might, in default of congenial associates, decline upon inferiors; all the more that a softness of heart, a fineness of humanity, ever disposed him to feel and show special kindness for the poor, the distressed, the unfortunate. Sherwood's acquaintances had little attraction for him; they were mostly people who lived in a luxurious way, went in for sports, talked about the money market—all of which

things fascinated Godfrey, though in truth he was far from belonging by nature to that particular world. With Franks, Will could be wholly himself, enjoying the slight advantage of his larger means, extending his knowledge without undue obligation, and getting all the good that comes to a man from the exercise of his kindest feelings.

With less of geniality, because more occupied with himself, Norbert Franks resembled his new friend in a distaste for ordinary social pleasures and an enjoyment of the intimacies of life. He stood very much alone in the world, and from the age of eighteen he had in one way or another supported himself, chiefly by work on illustrated papers. His father, who belonged to what is called a good family, began life in easy circumstances, and gained some reputation as a connoisseur of art; imprudence and misfortune having obliged him to sell his collection, Mr. Franks took to buying pictures and bric-a-brac for profit, and during the last ten years of his life was associated in that capacity with a London firm. Norbert, motherless from infancy and an only child, received his early education at expensive schools, but, showing little aptitude for study and much for use of the pencil, was taken by his father at twelve years old to Paris, and there set to work under a good art-teacher. At sixteen he went to Italy, where he remained for a couple of years. Then, on a journey in the East, the elder Franks died. Norbert returned to England, learnt that a matter of fifty pounds was all his heritage, and pluckily turned to the task of keeping himself alive. Herein his foreign sketch-books proved serviceable, but the struggle was long and hard before he could house himself decently, and get to serious work as a painter. Later on, he was wont to say that this poverty had been the best possible thing for him, its enforced abstinences having come just at the time when he had begun to "wallow"—his word for any sort of excess; and "wallowing" was undoubtedly a peril to which Norbert's temper particularly exposed him. Short commons made him, as they have made many another youth, sober and chaste, at all events in practice; and when he began to lift up his head, a little; when, at the age of three-and-twenty, he earned what seemed to him at first the luxurious income of a pound or so a week; when, in short, the inclination to "wallow" might again have taken hold upon him, it was his chance to fall in love so seriously and hopefully that all the better features of his character were drawn out, emphasized, and, as it seemed, for good and all established in predominance.

Not long after his first meeting with Warburton, he one day received, through the publishers of a book he had illustrated, a letter signed "Ralph Pomfret," the writer of which asked whether "Norbert Franks" was the son of an old friend of whom he had lost sight for many years. By way of answer, Franks called upon his correspondent, who lived in a pleasant little house at Ashted, in Surrey; he found a man of something less than sixty, with a touch of eccentricity in his thoughts and ways, by whom he was hospitably received, and invited to return whenever it pleased him. It was not very long before Franks asked permission to make the Pomfrets acquainted with his friend Warburton, a step which proved entirely justifiable. Together or separately, the two young men were often to be seen at Ashted, whither they were attracted not only by the kindly and amusing talk of Ralph Pomfret, but at least as much by the grace and sweetness and sympathetic intelligence of the mistress of the house, for whom both entertained respect and admiration.

One Sunday afternoon, Warburton, tempted as usual by the thought of tea and talk in that delightful little garden, went out to Ashted, and, as he pushed open the gate, was confused and vexed at the sight of strangers; there, before the house, stood a middle-aged gentleman and a young girl, chatting with Mrs. Pomfret. He would have turned away and taken himself off in disappointment, but that the clank of the gate had attracted attention, and he had no choice but to move forward. The strangers proved to be Mrs. Pomfret's brother and his daughter; they had been spending half a year in the south of France, and were here for a day or two before returning to their home at Bath. When he had recovered his equanimity, Warburton became aware that the young lady was fair to look upon. Her age seemed about two-and-twenty; not very tall, she bore herself with perhaps a touch of conscious dignity and impressiveness; perfect health, a warm complexion, magnificent hair, eyes that shone with gaiety and good-nature, made of Rosamund Elvan a living picture such as Will Warburton

had not often seen; he was shy in her presence, and by no means did himself justice that afternoon. His downcast eyes presently noticed that she wore shoes of a peculiar kind—white canvas with soles of plaited cord; in the course of conversation he learnt that these were a memento of the Basque country, about which Miss Elvan talked with a very pretty enthusiasm. Will went away, after all, in a dissatisfied mood. Girls were to him merely a source of disquiet. "If she be not fair for me—" was his ordinary thought; and he had never yet succeeded in persuading himself that any girl, fair or not, was at all likely to conceive the idea of devoting herself to his happiness. In this matter, an excessive modesty subdued him. It had something to do with his holding so much apart from general society.

On the evening of the next day, there was a thunderous knock at Warburton's flat, and in rushed Franks.

"You were at Ashtead yesterday," he cried.

"I was. What of that?"

"And you didn't come to tell me about the Elvans!"

"About Miss Elvan, I suppose you mean?" said Will.

"Well, yes, I do. I went there by chance this afternoon. The two men were away somewhere,—I found Mrs. Pomfret and that girl alone together. Never had such a delightful time in my life! But I say, Warburton, we must understand each other. Are you—do you—I mean, did she strike you particularly?"

Will threw back his head and laughed.

"You mean that?" shouted the other, joyously. "You really don't care—it's nothing to you?"

"Why, is it anything to *you*?"

"Anything? Rosamund Elvan is the most beautiful girl I ever saw, and the sweetest, and the brightest, and the altogether flooringest! And, by heaven and earth, I'm resolved to marry her!"

CHAPTER 5

As he sat musing, *The Art World* still in his hand, Warburton could hear his friend's voice ring out that audacious vow. He could remember, too, the odd little pang with which he heard it, a half spasm of altogether absurd jealousy. Of course the feeling did not last. There was no recurrence of it when he heard that Franks had again seen Miss Elvan before she left Ashtead; nor when he learnt that the artist had been spending a day or two at Bath. Less than a month after their first meeting, Franks won Rosamund's consent. He was frantic with exultation. Arriving with the news at ten o'clock one night, he shouted and maddened about Warburton's room until finally turned out at two in the morning. His circumstances being what they were, he could not hope for marriage yet awhile; he must work and wait. Never mind; see what work he would produce! Yet it appeared to his friend that all through the next twelvemonth he merely wasted time, such work as he did finish being of very slight value. He talked and talked, now of Rosamund, now of what he was *going* to do, until Warburton, losing patience, would cut him short with "Oh, go to Bath!"—an old cant phrase revived for its special appropriateness in this connection. Franks went to Bath far oftener than he could afford, money for his journey being generally borrowed from his long-enduring friend.

Rosamund herself had nothing, and but the smallest expectations should her father die. Two years before this, it had occurred to her that she should like to study art, and might possibly find in it a means of self-support. She was allowed to attend classes at South Kensington, but little came of this except a close friendship with a girl of her own age, by name Bertha Cross, who was following the art course with more serious purpose. When she had been betrothed for about a year, Rosamund chanced to spend a week in London at her friend's house, and this led to acquaintance between Franks and the Crosses. For a time, Warburton saw and heard less of the artist, who made confidantes of Mrs. Cross and her daughter, and spent many an evening with them talking, talking, talking about Rosamund; but this intimacy did not endure very long, Mrs. Cross being a person of marked peculiarities, which in the end overtried Norbert's temper. Only on the fourth story flat by Chelsea Bridge could the lover find that sort of sympathy which he really needed, solacing yet tonic. But for Warburton he would have worked even less. To Will it seemed an odd result of fortunate love that the artist, though in every other respect a better man than before, should have become, to all appearances, less zealous, less efficient, in his art. Had Rosamund Elvan the right influence on her lover; in spite of Norbert's lyric eulogy, had she served merely to confuse his aims, perhaps to bring him down to a lower level of thought?

There was his picture, "Sanctuary." Before he knew Rosamund, Franks would have scoffed at such a subject, would have howled at such treatment of it. There was notable distance between this and what Norbert was painting in that summer sunrise four years ago, with his portable easel in the gutter. And Miss Elvan admired "Sanctuary"—at least, Franks said she did. True, she also admired the picture of the pawnshop and the public-house; Will had himself heard her speak of it with high praise, and with impatient wonder that no purchaser could be found for it. Most likely she approved of everything Norbert did, and had no more serious criterion. Unless, indeed, her private test of artistic value were the financial result.

Warburton could not altogether believe that. Annoyance with the artist now and then inclined him to slighting thought of Rosamund; yet, on the whole, his view of her was not depreciatory. The disadvantage to his mind was her remarkable comeliness. He could not but fear that so much beauty must be inconsistent with the sterling qualities which make a good wife.

Will's eye fell on Sherwood's note, and he went to bed wondering what the project might be which was to make their fortune.

CHAPTER 6

He had breakfasted, and was smoking his pipe as he wrote a letter, when Mrs. Hopper announced the visit, by appointment, of her brother-in-law, Allchin. There entered a short, sturdy, red-headed young fellow, in a Sunday suit of respectable antiquity; his features were rude, his aspect dogged; but a certain intelligence showed in his countenance, and a not unamiable smile responded to the bluff heartiness of Warburton's greeting. By original calling, Allchin was a grocer's assistant, but a troublesome temper had more than once set him adrift, the outcast of grocerdom, to earn a living as best he could by his vigorous thews, and it was in one of these intervals that, having need of a porter at the works, Warburton had engaged him, on Mrs. Hopper's petition. After a month or so of irreproachable service, Allchin fought with a foreman, and took his discharge. The same week, Mrs. Allchin presented him with their first child; the family fell into want; Mrs. Hopper (squeezed between door and jamb) drew her master's attention to the lamentable case, and help was of course forthcoming. Then, by good luck, Allchin was enabled to resume his vocation; he got a place at a grocer's in Fulham Road, and in a few weeks presented himself before his benefactor, bringing half-a-crown as a first instalment toward the discharge of his debt; for only on this condition had he accepted the money. Half a year elapsed without troublesome incident; the man made regular repayment in small sums; then came the disaster which Mrs. Hopper had yesterday announced.

"Well, Allchin," cried Warburton, "what's the latest?"

Before speaking, the other pressed his lips tightly together and puffed out his cheeks, as if it cost him an effort to bring words to the surface. His reply came forth with explosive abruptness.

"Lost my place at Boxon's, sir."

"And how's that?"

"It happened last Saturday, sir. I don't want to make out as I wasn't at all to blame. I know as well as anybody that I've got a will of my own. But we're open late, as perhaps you know, sir, on Saturday night, and Mr. Boxon—well, it's only the truth—he's never quite himself after ten o'clock. I'd worked from eight in the morning to something past midnight—of course I don't think nothing of that, 'cause it's reg'lar in the trade. But—well, in come a customer, sir, a woman as didn't rightly know what she wanted; and she went out without buying, and Mr. Boxon he see it, and he come up to me and calls me the foulest name he could turn his tongue to. And so—well, sir, there was unpleasantness, as they say—"

He hesitated, Warburton eyeing him with a twinkle of subdued amusement.

"A quarrel, in fact, eh?"

"It did about come to that, sir!"

"You lost your temper, of course."

"That's about the truth, sir."

"And Boxon turned you out?"

Allchin looked hurt.

"Well, sir, I've no doubt he'd have liked to, but I was a bit beforehand with him. When I see him last, he was settin' on the pavement, sir, rubbin' his 'ead."

In spite of his inclination to laugh, Will kept a grave countenance.

"I'm afraid that kind of thing won't do, Allchin. You'll be in serious trouble one of these days."

"That's what my wife says, sir. I know well enough as it's hard on her, just after we've lost the baby—as perhaps Mrs. Hopper'll have told you, sir."

"I was very sorry to hear it, Allchin."

"Thank you, sir. You've always something kind to say. And I'm that vexed, because I was getting on well with paying my debts. But Mr. Boxon, sir, he's many a time made me that mad that I've gone out into the back yard and kicked the wall till my toes were sore, just to ease my feelings, like. To

tell the truth, sir, I don't think he's ever rightly sober, and I've heard others say the same. And his business is fallin' off, something shockin'. Customers don't like to be insulted; that's only natural. He's always going down to Kempton Park, or Epsom, or some such place. They do say as he lost 'undreds of pounds at Kempton Park last week. It's my opinion the shop can't go on much longer. Well, sir, I thought I just ought to come and tell you the truth of things, and I won't disturb you no longer. I shall do my best to find another place."

Warburton's impulse was to offer temporary work in Little Ailie Street, but he remembered that the business was not in a position to increase expenses, and that the refinery might any day be closed.

"All right," he answered cheerily, "let me know how you get on."

When Allchin's heavy footsteps had echoed away down the stairs, Mrs. Hopper answered her master's call.

"I suppose they have a little money to go on with?" Warburton inquired. "I mean, enough for a week or so."

"Yes, I think they have that, sir. But I see how it'll be. My poor sister'll end in the work'us. Allchin'll never keep a place. Not that I can blame him, sir, for givin' it to that Boxon, 'cause every one says he's a brute."

"Well, just let me know if they begin to be in want. But of course Allchin can always get work as a porter. He must learn to keep his fists down, if he doesn't want to be perpetually out of employment."

"That's what I tell him, sir. And my poor sister, sir, she's never stopped talkin' to him, day or night you may say, ever since it happened—"

"Merciful Heavens!" groaned Warburton to himself.

CHAPTER 7

At half-past nine he reached Little Ailie Street.

"Mr. Sherwood not here yet, I suppose?" asked Will.

"Oh yes, he is, sir," replied the manager; "been here for half an hour."

Warburton went on to the senior partner's room. There sat Godfrey Sherwood bent over a book which, to judge from the smile upon his face, could have nothing to do with the sugar-refining question.

"How do, Will?" he exclaimed, with even more than his usual cheerfulness. "Did you ever read 'The Adventures of a Younger Son'? Oh, you must. Listen here. He's describing how he thrashed an assistant master at school; thrashed him, he says, till 'the sweat dropped from his brows like rain-drops from the eaves of a pig-sty!' Ho-ho-ho! What do you think of that for a comparison? Isn't it strong? By Jove! a bracing book! Trelawny, you know; the friend of Byron. As breezy a book as I know. It does one good."

Godfrey Sherwood was, as regards his visage, what is called a plain young man, but his smile told of infinite good-nature, and his voice, notwithstanding its frequent note of energy or zeal, had a natural softness of intonation which suggested other qualities than the practical and vigorous.

"Enjoyed your holiday?" he went on, rising, stretching himself, and offering a box of cigarettes. "You look well. Done any summits? When we get our affairs in order, I must be off somewhere myself. Northward, I think. I want a little bracing cold. I should like to see Iceland. You know the Icelandic sagas? Magnificent! There's the saga of Grettir the Strong—by Jove! But come, this isn't business. I have news for you, real, substantial, hopeful news."

They seated themselves in roundbacked chairs, and Will lighted a cigarette.

"You know my thoughts were running on jam; jam is our salvation; of that I have long been convinced. I looked about, made a few inquiries, and by good luck, not long after you went off for your holiday, met just the man I wanted. You've heard of Applegarth's jams?"

Will said he had seen them advertised.

"Well, I came across Applegarth himself. I was talking to Linklater—and jams came up. 'You ought to see my friend Applegarth,' said he; and he arranged for us to meet. Applegarth happened to be in town, but he lives down in Somerset, and his factory is at Bristol. We all dined together at the Junior Carlton, and Applegarth and I got on so well that he asked me down to his place. Oxford man, clever, a fine musician, and an astronomer; has built himself a little observatory—magnificent telescope. By Jove! you should hear him handle the violin. Astonishing fellow! Not much of a talker; rather dry in his manner; but no end of energy, bubbling over with vital force. He began as a barrister, but couldn't get on, and saw his capital melting. 'Hang it!' said he, 'I must make some use of what money I have'; and he thought of jam. Brilliant idea! He began in a very modest way, down at Bristol, only aiming at local trade. But his jams were good; the demand grew; he built a factory; profits became considerable. And now, he wants to withdraw from active business, keeping an interest. Wants to find some one who would run and extend the concern—put in a fair capital, and leave him to draw his income quietly. You see?"

"Seems a good opportunity," said Warburton.

"Good? It's simply superb. He took me over the works—a really beautiful sight, everything so admirably arranged. Then we had more private talk. Of course I spoke of you, said I could do nothing till we had consulted together. I didn't seem too eager—not good policy. But we've had some correspondence, and you shall see the letters."

He handed them to his partner. Warburton saw that there was a question of a good many thousand pounds.

"Of course," he remarked, "I could only stand for a very small part in this."

"Well, we must talk about that. To tell you the truth, Will," Sherwood continued, crossing his legs and clasping his hands behind his head, "I don't see my way to find the whole capital, and yet I don't want to bring in a stranger. Applegarth could sell to a company any moment, but that isn't his idea; he wants to keep the concern in as few hands as possible. He has a first-rate manager; the mere jam-making wouldn't worry us at all; and the office work is largely a matter of routine. Will you take time to think about it?"

The figures which Warburton had before him were decidedly stimulating; they made a very pleasant contrast to the balance-sheets with which he had recently had to deal. He knew roughly what sum was at his disposal for investment; the winding-up of the business here could be completed at any moment, and involved no risk of surprises. But a thought had occurred to him which kept him silently reflecting for some minutes.

"I suppose," he said presently, "this affair has about as little risk as anything one could put money in?"

"I should say," Godfrey answered, with his man-of-business air, "that the element of risk is non-existent. What can be more solid than jam? There's competition to be sure; but Applegarth is already a good name throughout England, and in the West they swear by it. At Bristol, Exeter, Dorchester—all over there—Applegarth holds the field. Very seriously speaking, I see in this proposal nothing but sure and increasing gain."

"You know as well as I do," Will resumed, "how I stand. I have no resources of my own beyond what you are aware of. But I've been thinking—"

He broke off, stared at the window, drummed on the arm of his chair, Sherwood waiting with a patient smile.

"It's my mother and sister I have in mind," Will resumed. "That property of theirs; it brings them about a hundred and fifty pounds a year in cash, and three times that in worry. At any moment they might sell. A man at St. Neots offers four thousand pounds; I suspect more might be got if Turnbull, their lawyer, took the matter in hand. Suppose I advise them to sell and put the money in Applegarth?"

"By Jove!" cried Sherwood. "How could they do better? Splendid idea!"

"Yes—if all goes well. Bear in mind, on the other hand, that if they lost this money, they would have nothing to live upon, or as good as nothing. They draw some fifty pounds a year from another source, and they have their own house—that's all. Ought I to take this responsibility?"

"I don't hesitate to guarantee," said Sherwood, with glowing gravity, "that in two years' time their four thousand pounds shall produce three times what it does now. Only think, my dear fellow! Jam—think what it means!"

For ten minutes Godfrey rhapsodised on the theme. Warburton was moved by his eloquence.

"I shall run down to St. Neots," said Will at length.

"Do. And then we'll both of us go down to Bristol. I'm sure you'll like Applegarth. By the bye, you never went in for astronomy, did you? I felt ashamed of my ignorance. Why, it's one of the most interesting subjects a man can study. I shall take it up. One might have a little observatory of one's own. Do you know Bristol at all? A beastly place, the town, but perfectly delightful country quite near at hand. Applegarth lives in an ideal spot—you'll see."

There was a knock at the door and the manager entered. Other business claimed their attention.

CHAPTER 8

Warburton often returned from Whitechapel to Chelsea on foot, enjoying the long walk after his day in the office. This evening, a heavily clouded sky and sobbing wind told that rain was not far off; nevertheless, wishing to think hard, which he could never do so well as when walking at a brisk pace, he set off in the familiar direction—a straight cut across South London.

In Lower Kennington Lane he stopped, as his habit was, at a little stationer's shop, over which was the name Potts. During his last year in the West Indies, he had befriended an English lad whose health was suffering from the climate, and eventually had paid his passage to the United States, whither the young adventurer wished to go in pursuit of his fortune. Not long after he received a letter of thanks from the lad's father, and, on coming to London, he sought out Mr. Potts, whose gratitude and its quaint expression had pleased him. The acquaintance continued; whenever Warburton passed the shop he stepped in and made purchases—generally of things he did not in the least want. Potts had all the characteristics which were wont to interest Will, and touch his sympathies; he was poor, weak of body, humble-spirited, and of an honest, simple mind. Nothing more natural and cordial than Will's bearing as he entered and held out his hand to the shopkeeper. How was business? Any news lately from Jack? Jack, it seemed, was doing pretty well at Pittsburgh; would Mr. Warburton care to read a long letter that had arrived from him a week ago? To his satisfaction, Will found that the letter had enclosed a small sum of money, for a present on the father's birthday. Having, as usual, laden himself with newspapers, periodicals and notepaper, he went his way.

At grimy Vauxhall he crossed the river, and pursued his course along Grosvenor Road. Rain had begun to fall, and the driving of the wind obliged him to walk with the umbrella before his face. Happening to glance ahead, when not far from home, he saw, at a distance of twenty yards, a man whom he took for Norbert Franks. The artist was coming toward him, but suddenly he turned round about, and walked rapidly away, disappearing in a moment down a side street. Franks it certainly was; impossible to mistake his figure, his gait; and Warburton felt sure that the abrupt change of direction was caused by his friend's desire to avoid him. At the end of the byway he looked, and there was the familiar figure, marching with quick step into the rainy distance. Odd! but perhaps it simply meant that Franks had not seen him.

He reached home, wrote some letters, made preparations for leaving town by an early train next morning, and dined with his customary appetite. Whilst smoking his after-dinner pipe, he thought again of that queer little incident in Grosvenor Road, and resolved of a sudden to go and see Franks. It still rained, so he took advantage of a passing hansom, and drove in a few minutes to the artist's lodging on the south side of Battersea Park. The door was opened to him by the landlady, who smiled recognition.

"No, sir, Mr. Franks isn't at home, and hasn't been since after breakfast this morning. And I don't understand it; because he told me last night that he'd be working all day, and I was to get meals for him as usual. And at ten o'clock the model came—that rough man he's putting into the new picture, you know, sir; and I had to send him away, when he'd waited more than an hour."

Warburton was puzzled.

"I'll take my turn at waiting," he said. "Will you please light the gas for me in the studio?"

The studio was merely, in lodging-house language, the first floor front; a two-windowed room, with the advantage of north light. On the walls hung a few framed paintings, several unframed and unfinished, water-colour sketches, studies in crayon, photographs, and so on. In the midst stood the easel, supporting a large canvas, the artist's work on which showed already in a state of hopeful advancement. "The Slummer" was his provisional name for this picture; he had not yet hit upon that more decorous title which might suit the Academy catalogue. A glance discovered the subject. In a typical London slum, between small and vile houses, which lowered upon the narrow way, stood

a tall, graceful, prettily-clad young woman, obviously a visitant from other spheres; her one hand carried a book, and the other was held by a ragged, cripple child, who gazed up at her with a look of innocent adoration. Hard by stood a miserable creature with an infant at her breast, she too adoring the representative of health, wealth, and charity. Behind, a costermonger, out of work, sprawled on the curbstone, viewing the invader; he, with resentful eye, his lip suggestive of words unreportable. Where the face of the central figure should have shone, the canvas still remained blank.

"I'm afraid he's worried about *her*," said the landlady, when she had lit the gas, and stood with Warburton surveying the picture. "He can't find a model good-looking enough. I say to Mr. Franks why not make it the portrait of his own young lady? I'm sure *she's* good-looking enough for anything and—"

Whilst speaking, the woman had turned to look at a picture on the wall. Words died upon her lips; consternation appeared in her face; she stood with finger extended. Warburton, glancing where he was accustomed to see the portrait of Rosamund Elvan, also felt a shock. For, instead of the face which should have smiled upon him, he saw an ugly hole in the picture, the canvas having been violently cut, or rent with a blow.

"Hallo! What the deuce has he been doing?"

"Well, I never!" exclaimed the landlady. "It must be himself that's done it! What does *that* mean now, I wonder?"

Warburton was very uneasy. He no longer doubted that Franks had purposely avoided him this afternoon.

"I daresay," he added, with a pretence of carelessness, "the portrait had begun to vex him. He's often spoken of it discontentedly, and talked of painting another. It wasn't very good."

Accepting, or seeming to accept this explanation, the landlady withdrew, and Will paced thoughtfully about the floor. He was back in Switzerland, in the valley which rises to the glacier of Trient. Before him rambled Ralph Pomfret and his wife; at his side was Rosamund Elvan, who listened with a flattering air of interest to all he said, but herself spoke seldom, and seemed, for the most part, preoccupied with some anxiety. He spoke of Norbert Franks; Miss Elvan replied mechanically, and at once made a remark about the landscape. At the time, he had thought little of this; now it revived in his memory, and disturbed him.

An hour passed. His patience was nearly at an end. He waited another ten minutes, then left the room, called to the landlady that he was going, and let himself out.

Scarcely had he walked half a dozen yards, when he stood face to face with Franks.

"Ah! Here you are! I waited as long as I could—"

"I'll walk with you," said the artist, turning on his heels.

He had shaken hands but limply. His look avoided Warburton's. His speech was flat, wearied.

"What's wrong, Franks?"

"As you've been in the studio, I daresay you know."

"I saw something that surprised me."

"*Did* it surprise you?" asked Norbert, in a half-sullen undertone.

"What do you mean by that?" said Will with subdued resentment.

The rain had ceased; a high wind buffeted them as they went along the almost deserted street. The necessity of clutching at his hat might have explained Norbert's silence for a moment; but he strode on without speaking.

"Of course, if you don't care to talk about it," said Will, stopping short.

"I've been walking about all day," Franks replied; "and I've got hell inside me; I'd rather not have met you to-night, that's the truth. But I can't let you go without asking a plain question. *Did* it surprise you to see that portrait smashed?"

"Very much. What do you hint at?"

"I had a letter this morning from Rosamund, saying she couldn't marry me, and that all must be over between us. Does *that* surprise you?"

"Yes, it does. Such a possibility had never entered my mind."

Franks checked his step, just where the wind roared at an unprotected corner.

"I've no choice but to believe you," he said, irritably. "And no doubt I'm making a fool of myself. That's why I shot out of your way this afternoon—I wanted to wait till I got calmer. Let's say good-night."

"You're tired out," said Warburton. "Don't go any farther this way, but let me walk back with you—I won't go in. I can't leave you in this state of mind. Of course I begin to see what you mean, and a wilder idea never got into any man's head. Whatever the explanation of what has happened, *I* have nothing to do with it."

"You say so, and I believe you."

"Which means, that you don't. I shan't cut up rough; you're not yourself, and I can make all allowances. Think over what I've said, and come and have another talk. Not to-morrow; I have to go down to St. Neots. But the day after, in the evening."

"Very well. Good-night."

This time they did not shake hands. Franks turned abruptly, with a wave of the arm, and walked off unsteadily, like a man in liquor. Observing this, Warburton said to himself that not improbably the artist had been trying to drown his misery, which might account for his strange delusion. Yet this explanation did not put Will's mind at ease. Gloomily he made his way homeward through the roaring night.

CHAPTER 9

Ten o'clock next morning saw him alighting from the train at St. Neots. A conveyance for which he had telegraphed awaited him at the station; its driver, a young man of his own age (they had known each other from boyhood), grinned his broadest as he ran toward Will on the platform, and relieved him of his bag.

"Well, Sam, how goes it? Everybody flourishing?—Drive first to Mr. Turnbull's office."

Mr. Turnbull was a grey-headed man of threescore, much troubled with lumbago, which made him stoop as he walked. He had a visage of extraordinary solemnity, and seemed to regard every one, no matter how prosperous or cheerful, with anxious commiseration. At the sight of Will, he endeavoured to smile, and his handshake, though the flabbiest possible, was meant for a cordial response to the young man's heartiness.

"I'm on my way to The Haws, Mr. Turnbull, and wanted to ask if you could come up and see us this evening?"

"Oh, with pleasure," answered the lawyer, his tone that of one invited to a funeral. "You may count on me."

"We're winding up at Sherwood's. I don't mean in bankruptcy; but that wouldn't be far off if we kept going."

"Ah! I can well understand that," said Mr. Turnbull, with a gleam of satisfaction. Though a thoroughly kind man, it always brightened him to hear of misfortune, especially when he had himself foretold it; and he had always taken the darkest view of Will's prospects in Little Ailie Street.

"I have a project I should like to talk over with you—"

"Ah?" said the lawyer anxiously.

"As it concerns my mother and Jane—"

"Ah?" said Mr. Turnbull, with profound despondency.

"Then we shall expect you.—Will it rain, do you think?"

"I fear so. The glass is very low indeed. It wouldn't surprise me if we had rain through the whole month of August."

"Good Heavens! I hope not," replied Will laughing.

He drove out of the town again, in a different direction, for about a mile. On rising ground, overlooking the green valley of the Ouse, stood a small, plain, solidly-built house, sheltered on the cold side by a row of fine hawthorns, nearly as high as the top of its chimneys. In front, bordered along the road by hollies as impenetrable as a stone wall, lay a bright little flower garden. The Haws, originally built for the bailiff of an estate, long since broken up, was nearly a century old. Here Will's father was born, and here, after many wanderings, he had spent the greater part of his married life.

"Sam," said Will, as they drew up at the gate, "I don't think I shall pay for this drive. You're much richer than I am."

"Very good, sir," was the chuckling reply, for Sam knew he always had to expect a joke of this kind from young Mr. Warburton. "As you please, sir."

"You couldn't lend me half-a-crown, Sam?"

"I daresay I could, sir, if you really wanted it."

"Do then."

Will pocketed the half-crown, jumped off the trap, and took his bag.

"After all, Sam, perhaps I'd better pay. Your wife might grumble. Here you are."

He handed two shillings and sixpence in small change, which Sam took and examined with a grin of puzzlement.

"Well, what's the matter? Don't you say thank you, nowadays?"

"Yes, sir—thank you, sir—it's all right, Mr. Will."

"I should think it is indeed. Be here to-morrow morning, to catch the 6.30 up train, Sam."

As Will entered the garden, there came forward a girl of something and twenty, rather short, square shouldered, firmly planted on her feet, but withal brisk of movement; her face was remarkable for nothing but a grave good-humour. She wore a broad-brimmed straw hat, and her gardening gloves showed how she was occupied. Something of shyness appeared in the mutual greeting of brother and sister.

"Of course, you got my letter this morning?" said Will.

"Yes."

"Mr. Turnbull is coming up to-night."

"I'm glad of that," said Jane thoughtfully, rubbing her gloves together to shake off moist earth.

"Of course he'll prophesy disaster, and plunge you both into the depths of discouragement. But I don't mind that. I feel so confident myself that I want some one to speak on the other side. He'll have to make inquiries, of course.—Where's mother?"

The question was answered by Mrs. Warburton herself, who at that moment came forth from the house; a tall, graceful woman, prematurely white-headed, and enfeebled by ill-health. Between her and Jane there was little resemblance of feature; Will, on the other hand, had inherited her oval face, arched brows and sensitive mouth. Emotion had touched her cheek with the faintest glow, but ordinarily it was pale as her hand. Nothing, however, of the invalid declared itself in her tone or language; the voice, soft and musical, might have been that of a young woman, and its vivacity was only less than that which marked the speech of her son.

"Come and look at the orange lilies," were her first words, after the greeting. "They've never been so fine."

"But notice Pompey first," said Jane. "He'll be offended in a minute."

A St. Bernard, who had already made such advances as his dignity permitted, stood close by Will, with eyes fixed upon him in grave and surprised reproach. The dog's name indicated a historical preference of Jane in her childhood; she had always championed Pompey against Caesar, following therein her brother's guidance.

"Hallo, old Magnus!" cried the visitor, cordially repairing his omission. "Come along with us and see the lilies."

It was only when all the sights of the little garden had been visited, Mrs. Warburton forgetting her weakness as she drew Will hither and thither, that the business for which they had met came under discussion. Discussion, indeed, it could hardly be called, for the mother and sister were quite content to listen whilst Will talked, and accept his view of things. Small as their income was, they never thought of themselves as poor; with one maid-servant and the occasional help of a gardener, they had all the comfort they wished for, and were able to bestow of their superfluity in vegetables and flowers upon less fortunate acquaintances. Until a year or two ago, Mrs. Warburton had led a life of ceaseless activity, indoors and out; such was the habit of her daughter, who enjoyed vigorous health, and cared little for sedentary pursuits and amusements. Their property, land and cottages hard by, had of late given them a good deal of trouble, and the proposal to sell had more than once been considered, but Mr. Turnbull, most cautious of counsellors, urged delay. Now, at length, the hoped-for opportunity of a good investment seemed to have presented itself; Will's sanguine report of what he had learnt from Sherwood was gladly accepted.

"It'll be a good thing for you as well," said Jane. "Yes, it comes just in time. Sherwood knew what he was doing; now and then I've thought he was risking too much, but he's a clear-headed fellow. The way he has kept things going so long in Ailie Street is really remarkable."

"I daresay you had your share in that, Will," said Mrs. Warburton.

"A very small one; my work has never been more than routine. I don't pretend to be a man of business. If it had depended upon me, the concern would have fallen to pieces years ago, like so many

others. House after house has gone down; our turn must have come very soon. As it is, we shall clear out with credit, and start afresh gloriously. By the bye, don't get any but Applegarth's jams in future."

"That depends," said Jane laughing, "if we like them."

In their simple and wholesome way of living, the Warburtons of course dined at midday, and Will, who rarely ate without appetite, surpassed himself as trencherman; nowhere had food such a savour for him as under this roof. The homemade bread and home-grown vegetables he was never tired of praising; such fragrant and toothsome loaves, he loudly protested, were to be eaten nowhere else in England. He began to talk of his holiday abroad, when all at once his countenance fell, his lips closed; in the pleasure of being "at home," he had forgotten all about Norbert Franks, and very unwelcome were the thoughts which attached themselves to this recollection of his days at Trient.

"What's the matter?" asked Jane, noticing his change of look.

"Oh, nothing—a stupid affair. I wrote to you about the Pomfrets and their niece. I'm afraid that girl is an idiot. She used the opportunity of her absence, I find, to break with Franks. No excuse whatever; simply sent him about his business."

"Oh!" exclaimed both the ladies, who had been interested in the artist's love story, as narrated to them, rather badly, by Will on former occasions.

"Of course, I don't know much about it. But it looks bad. Perhaps it's the best thing that could have happened to Franks, for it may mean that he hasn't made money fast enough to please her."

"But you gave us quite another idea of Miss Elvan," said his mother.

"Yes, I daresay I did. Who knows? I don't pretend to understand such things."

A little before sunset came Mr. Turnbull, who took supper at The Haws, and was fetched away by his coachman at ten o'clock. With this old friend, who in Will's eyes looked no older now than when he first knew him in early childhood, they talked freely of the Applegarth business, and Mr. Turnbull promised to make inquiries at once. Of course, he took a despondent view of jam. Jam, he inclined to think, was being overdone; after all, the country could consume only a certain quantity of even the most wholesome preserves, and a glut of jam already threatened the market. Applegarth? By the bye, did he not remember proceedings in bankruptcy connected with that unusual name? He must look into the matter. And, talking about bankruptcy—oh! how bad his lumbago was to-night!—poor Thomas Hart, of Three Ash Farm, was going to be sold up. Dear, dear! On every side, look where one would, nothing but decline and calamity. What was England coming to? Day by day he had expected to see the failure of Sherwood Brothers; how had they escaped the common doom of sugar refiners? Free trade, free trade; all very fine in theory, but look at its results on corn and sugar. For his own part he favoured a policy of moderate protection.

All this was not more than Will had foreseen. It would be annoying if Mr. Turnbull ultimately took an adverse view of his proposal; in that case, though his mother was quite free to manage her property as she chose, Will felt that he should not venture to urge his scheme against the lawyer's advice, and money must be sought elsewhere. A few days would decide the matter. As he went upstairs to bed, he dismissed worries from his mind.

The old quiet, the old comfort of home. Not a sound but that of pattering rain in the still night. As always, the room smelt of lavender, blended with that indescribable fragrance which comes of extreme cleanliness in an old country house. But for changed wall paper and carpet, everything was as Will remembered it ever since he could remember anything at all; the same simple furniture, the same white curtains, the same pictures, the same little hanging shelf, with books given to him in childhood. He thought of the elder brother who had died at school, and lay in the little churchyard far away. His only dark memory, that of the poor boy's death after a very short illness, before that other blow which made him fatherless.

The earlier retrospect was one of happiness unbroken; for all childish sorrows lost themselves in the very present sense of peace and love enveloping those far-away years. His parents' life, as he saw it then, as in reflection he saw it now, remained an ideal; he did not care to hope for himself,

or to imagine, any other form of domestic contentment. As a child, he would have held nothing less conceivable than a moment's discord between father and mother, and manhood's meditation did but confirm him in the same view.

The mutual loyalty of kindred hearts and minds—that was the best life had to give. And Will's thoughts turned once more to Norbert Franks; he, poor fellow, doubtless now raging against the faithlessness which had blackened all his sky. In this moment of softened feeling, of lucid calm, Warburton saw Rosamund's behaviour in a new light. Perhaps she was not blameworthy at all, but rather deserving of all praise; for, if she had come to know, beyond doubt, that she did not love Norbert Franks as she had thought, then to break the engagement was her simple duty, and the courage with which she had taken this step must be set to her credit. Naturally, it would be some time before Franks himself took that view. A third person, whose vanity was not concerned, might moralise thus—

Will checked himself on an unpleasant thought. Was *his* vanity, in truth, unconcerned in this story? Why, then, had he been conscious of a sub-emotion, quite unavowable, which contradicted his indignant sympathy during that talk last night in the street? If the lover's jealousy were as ridiculous as he pretended, why did he feel what now he could confess to himself was an unworthy titillation, when Franks seemed to accuse him of some part in the girl's disloyalty? Vanity, that, sure enough; vanity of a very weak and futile kind. He would stamp the last traces of it out of his being. Happily it was but vanity, and no deeper feeling. Of this he was assured by the reposeful sigh with which he turned his head upon the pillow, drowsing to oblivion.

One unbroken sleep brought him to sunrise; a golden glimmer upon the blind in his return to consciousness told him that the rain was over, and tempted him to look forth. What he saw was decisive; with such a sky as that gleaming over the summer world, who could lie in bed? Will always dressed as if in a fury; seconds sufficed him for details of the toilet, which, had he spent minutes over them, would have fretted his nerves intolerably. His bath was one wild welter—not even the ceiling being safe from splashes; he clad himself in a brief series of plunges; his shaving might have earned the applause of an assembly gathered to behold feats of swift dexterity. Quietly he descended the stairs, and found the house-door already open; this might only mean that the servant was already up, but he suspected that the early riser was Jane. So it proved; he walked toward the kitchen garden, and there stood his sister, the sun making her face rosy.

"Come and help to pick scarlet runners," was her greeting, as he approached. "Aren't they magnificent?"

Her eyes sparkled with pleasure as she pointed to the heavy clusters of dark-green pods, hanging amid leaves and scarlet bloom.

"Splendid crop!" exclaimed Will, with answering enthusiasm.

"Doesn't the scent do one good?" went on his sister. "When I come into the garden on a morning like this, I have a feeling—oh, I can't describe it to you—perhaps you wouldn't understand—"

"I know," said Will, nodding.

"It's as if nature were calling out to me, like a friend, to come and admire and enjoy what she has done. I feel grateful for the things that earth offers me."

Not often did Jane speak like this; as a rule she was anything but effusive or poetical. But a peculiar animation shone in her looks this morning, and sounded in her voice. Very soon the reason was manifest; she began to speak of the Applegarth business, and declared her great satisfaction with it.

"There'll be an end of mother's worry," she said, "and I can't tell you how glad I shall be. It seems to me that women oughtn't to have to think about money, and mother hates the name of it; she always has done. Oh, what a blessing when it's all off our hands! We shouldn't care, even if the new arrangement brought us less."

"And it is certain to bring you more," remarked Will, "perhaps considerably more."

"Well, I shan't object to that; there are lots of uses for money; but it doesn't matter."

Jane's sincerity was evident. She dismissed the matter, and her basket being full of beans, seized a fork to dig potatoes.

"Here, let me do that," cried Will, interposing.

"You? Well then, as a very great favour."

"Of course I mean that. It's grand to turn up potatoes. What sort are these?"

"Pink-eyed flukes," replied Jane, watching him with keen interest. "We haven't touched them yet."

"Mealy, eh?"

"Balls of flour!"

Their voices joined in a cry of exultation, as the fork threw out even a finer root than they had expected. When enough had been dug, they strolled about, looking at other vegetables. Jane pointed to some Savoy seedlings, which she was going to plant out to-day. Then there sounded a joyous bark, and Pompey came bounding toward them.

"That means the milk-boy is here," said Jane. "Pompey always goes to meet him in the morning. Come and drink a glass—warm."

CHAPTER 10

Back at Chelsea, Will sent a note to Norbert Franks, a line or two without express reference to what had happened, asking him to come and have a talk. Three days passed, and there was no reply. Will grew uneasy; for, though the artist's silence perhaps meant only sullenness, danger might lurk in such a man's thwarted passion. On the fourth evening, just as he had made up his mind to walk over to Queen's Road, the familiar knock sounded. Mrs. Hopper had left; Will went to the door, and greeted his visitor in the usual way. But Franks entered without speaking. The lamplight showed a pitiful change in him; he was yellow and fishy-eyed, unshaven, disorderly in dress indeed, so well did he look the part of the despairing lover that Warburton suspected a touch of theatric consciousness.

"If you hadn't come to-night," said Will, "I should have looked you up."

Franks lay limply in the armchair, staring blankly.

"I ought to have come before," he replied in low, toneless voice. "That night when I met you, I made a fool of myself. For one thing, I was drunk, and I've been drunk ever since."

"Ha! That accounts for your dirty collar," remarked Will, in his note of dry drollery.

"Is it dirty?" said the other, passing a finger round his neck. "What does it matter? A little dirt more or less, in a world so full of it—"

Warburton could not contain himself; he laughed, and laughed again. And his mirth was contagious; Franks chuckled, unwillingly, dolefully.

"You are not extravagant in sympathy," said the artist, moving with fretful nervousness.

"If I were, would it do you any good, old fellow? Look here, are we to talk of this affair or not? Just as you like. For my part, I'd rather talk about 'The Slummer.' I had a look at it the other day. Uncommonly good, the blackguard on the curbstone, you've got him."

"You think so?" Franks sat a little straighter, but still with vacant eye. "Yes, not bad, I think. But who knows whether I shall finish the thing."

"If you don't," replied his friend, in a matter-of-fact tone, "you'll do something better. But I should finish it, if I were you. If you had the courage to paint in the right sort of face—the girl, you know."

"What sort of face, then?"

"Sharp-nosed, thin-lipped, rather anaemic, with a universe of self-conceit in the eye."

"They wouldn't hang it, and nobody would buy it. Besides, Warburton, you're wrong if you think the slummers are always that sort. Still, I'm not sure I shan't do it, out of spite. There's another reason, too—I hate beautiful women; I don't think I shall ever be able to paint another."

He sprang up, and paced, as of old, about the room. Will purposely kept silence.

"I've confessed," Franks began again, with effort, "that I made a fool of myself the other night. But I wish you'd tell me something about your time at Trient. Didn't you notice anything? Didn't anything make you suspect what she was going to do?"

"I never for a moment foresaw it," replied Will, with unemphasised sincerity.

"Yet she must have made up her mind whilst you were there. Her astounding hypocrisy! I had a letter a few days before, the same as usual—"

"Quite the same?"

"Absolutely!—Well, there was no difference that struck me. Then all at once she declares that for months she had felt her position false and painful. What a monstrous thing! Why did she go on pretending, playing a farce? I could have sworn that no girl lived who was more thoroughly honest in word and deed and thought. It's awful to think how one can be deceived. I understand now the novels about unfaithful wives, and all that kind of thing. I always said to myself—'Pooh, as if a fellow wouldn't know if his wife were deceiving him!' By Jove this has made me afraid of the thought of marriage. I shall never again trust a woman."

Warburton sat in meditation, only half smiling.

"Of course, she's ashamed to face me. For fear I should run after her, she wrote that they were just leaving Trient for another place, not mentioned. If I wrote, I was to address to Bath, and the letter would be forwarded. I wrote—of course a fool's letter; I only wish I'd never sent it. Sometimes I think I'll never try to see her again; sometimes I think I'll make her see me, and tell her the truth about herself. The only thing is—I'm half afraid—I've gone through torture enough; I don't want to begin again. Yet if I saw her—"

He took another turn across the room, then checked himself before Warburton.

"Tell me honestly what you think about it. I want advice. What's your opinion of her?"

"I have no opinion at all. I don't pretend to know her well enough."

"Well, but," persisted Franks, "your impression—your feeling. How does the thing strike you?"

"Why, disagreeably enough; that's a matter of course."

"You don't excuse her?" asked Norbert, his eyes fixed on the other.

"I can imagine excuses—"

"What? What excuse can there be for deliberate hypocrisy, treachery?"

"If it *was* deliberate," replied Warburton, "there's nothing to be said. In your position—since you ask advice—I should try to think that it wasn't, but that the girl had simply changed her mind, and went on and on, struggling with herself till she could stand it no longer. I've no taste for melodrama quiet comedy is much more in my line—comedy ending with mutual tolerance and forgiveness. To be sure, if you feel you can't live without her, if you're determined to fight for her—"

"Fight with whom?" cried Franks.

"With *her*; then read Browning, and blaze away. It may be the best; who can tell? Only—on this point I am clear—no self-deception! Don't go in for heroics just because they seem fine. Settle with yourself whether she is indispensable to you or not.—Indispensable? why, no woman is that to any man; sooner or later, it's a matter of indifference. And if you feel, talking plainly with yourself, that the worst is over already, that it doesn't after all matter as much as you thought; why, get back to your painting. If you can paint only ugly women, so much the better, I've no doubt."

Franks stood reflecting. Then he nodded.

"All that is sensible enough. But, if I give her up, I shall marry some one else straight away."

Then he abruptly said good-night, leaving Warburton not unhopeful about him, and much consoled by the disappearance of the shadow which had threatened their good understanding.

CHAPTER 11

The Crosses, mother and daughter, lived at Walham Green. The house was less pleasant than another which Mrs. Cross owned at Putney, but it also represented a lower rental, and poverty obliged them to take this into account. When the second house stood tenantless, as had now been the case for half a year, Mrs. Cross' habitually querulous comment on life rose to a note of acrimony very afflictive to her daughter Bertha. The two bore as little resemblance to each other, physical or mental, as mother and child well could. Bertha Cross was a sensible, thoughtful girl, full of kindly feeling, and blest with a humorous turn that enabled her to see the amusing rather than the carking side of her pinched life. These virtues she had from her father. Poor Cross, who supplemented a small income from office routine by occasional comic journalism, and even wrote a farce (which brought money to a theatrical manager), made on his deathbed a characteristic joke. He had just signed his will, and was left alone with his wife. "I'm sure I've, always wished to make your life happy," piped the afflicted woman. "And I yours," he faintly answered; adding, with a sad, kind smile, as he pointed to the testamentary document, "Take the will for the deed."

The two sons had emigrated to British Columbia, and Bertha would not have been sorry to join her brothers there, for domestic labour on a farm, in peace and health, seemed to her considerably better than the quasi-genteel life she painfully supported. She had never dreamt of being an artist, but, showing some facility with the pencil, was sent by her father to South Kensington, where she met and made friends with Rosamund Elvan. Her necessity and her application being greater than Rosamund's, Bertha before long succeeded in earning a little money; without this help, life at home would scarcely have been possible for her. They might, to be sure, have taken a lodger, having spare rooms, but Mrs. Cross could only face that possibility if the person received into the house were "respectable" enough to be called a paying guest, and no such person offered. So they lived, as no end of "respectable" families do, a life of penury and seclusion, sometimes going without a meal that they might have decent clothing to wear abroad, never able to buy a book, to hear a concert, and only by painful sacrifice able to entertain a friend. When, on a certain occasion, Miss Elvan passed a week at their house (Mrs. Cross approved of this friendship, and hoped it might be a means of discovering the paying guest), it meant for them a near approach to starvation during the month that ensued.

Time would have weighed heavily on Mrs. Cross but for her one recreation, which was perennial, ever fresh, constantly full of surprises and excitement. Poor as she was, she contrived to hire a domestic servant; to say that she "kept" one would come near to a verbal impropriety, seeing that no servant ever remained in the house for more than a few months, whilst it occasionally happened that the space of half a year would see a succession of some half dozen "generals." Underpaid and underfed, these persons (they varied in age from fourteen to forty) were of course incompetent, careless, rebellious, and Mrs. Cross found the sole genuine pleasure of her life in the war she waged with them. Having no reasonable way of spending her hours, she was thus supplied with occupation; being of acrid temper, she was thus supplied with a subject upon whom she could fearlessly exercise it; being remarkably mean of disposition, she saw in the paring-down of her servant's rations to a working minimum, at once profit and sport; lastly, being fond of the most trivial gossip, she had a never-failing topic of discussion with such ladies as could endure her society.

Bertha, having been accustomed to this domestic turbulence all her life long, for the most part paid no heed to it. She knew that if the management of the house were in her hands, instead of her mother's, things would go much more smoothly, but the mere suggestion of such a change (ventured once at a moment of acute crisis) had so amazed and exasperated Mrs. Cross, that Bertha never again looked in that direction. Yet from time to time a revolt of common sense forced her to speak, and as the only possible way, if quarrel were to be avoided, she began her remonstrance on the humorous note. Then when her mother had been wearying her for half an hour with complaints and lamentations

over the misdoings of one Emma, Bertha as the alternative to throwing up her hands and rushing out of the house, began laughing to herself, whereat Mrs. Cross indignantly begged to be informed what there was so very amusing in a state of affairs which would assuredly bring her to her grave.

"If only you could see the comical side of it, mother," replied Bertha. "It really has one, you know. Emma, if only you would be patient with her, is a well-meaning creature, and she says the funniest things. I asked her this morning if she didn't think she could find some way of remembering to put the salt on the table. And she looked at me very solemnly, and said, 'Indeed, I will, miss. I'll put it into my prayers, just after 'our daily bread.'"

Mrs. Cross saw nothing in this but profanity. She turned the attack on Bertha, who, by her soft way of speaking, simply encouraged the servants, she declared, in negligence and insolence.

"Look at it in this way, mother," replied the girl, as soon as she was suffered to speak. "To be badly served is bad enough, in itself; why make it worse by ceaseless talking about it, so leaving ourselves not a moment of peace and quiet? I'm sure I'd rather put the salt on the table myself at every meal, and think no more about it, than worry, worry, worry over the missing salt-cellar from one meal to the next. Don't you feel, dear mother, that it's shocking waste of life?"

"What nonsense you talk, child! Are we to live in dirt and disorder? Am I *never* to correct a servant, or teach her her duties? But of course everything *I* do is wrong. Of course *you* could do everything so very much better. That's what children are nowadays."

Whilst Mrs. Cross piped on, Bertha regarded her with eyes of humorous sadness. The girl often felt it a dreary thing not to be able to respect—nay, not to be able to feel much love for—her mother. At such times, her thought turned to the other parent, with whom, had he and she been left alone, she could have lived so happily, in so much mutual intelligence and affection. She sighed and moved away.

The unlet house was a very serious matter, and when one day Norbert Franks came to talk about it, saying that he would want a house very soon, and thought this of Mrs. Cross's might suit him, Bertha rejoiced no less than her mother. In consequence of the artist's announcement, she wrote to her friend Rosamund, saying how glad she was to hear that her marriage approached. The reply to this letter surprised her. Rosamund had been remiss in correspondence for the last few months; her few and brief letters, though they were as affectionate as ever, making no mention of what had formerly been an inexhaustible topic—the genius, goodness, and brilliant hopes of Franks. Now she wrote as if in utter despondency, a letter so confused in style and vague in expression, that Bertha could gather from it little or nothing except a grave doubt whether Franks' marriage was as near as he supposed. A week or two passed, and Rosamund again wrote—from Switzerland; again the letter was an unintelligible maze of dreary words, and a mere moaning and sighing, which puzzled Bertha as much as it distressed her. Rosamund's epistolary style, when she wrote to this bosom friend, was always pitched in a key of lyrical emotion, which now and then would have been trying to Bertha's sense of humour but for the sincerity manifest in every word; hitherto, however, she had expressed herself with perfect lucidity, and this sudden change seemed ominous of alarming things. Just when Bertha was anxiously wondering what could have happened,—of course inclined to attribute blame, if blame there were, to the artist rather than to his betrothed—a stranger came to inquire about the house to let. It was necessary to ascertain at once whether Mr. Franks intended to become their tenant or not. Mrs. Cross wrote to him, and received the briefest possible reply, to the effect that his plans were changed.

"How vexatious!" exclaimed Mrs. Cross. "I had very much rather have let to people we know I suppose he's seen a house that suits him better."

"I think there's another reason," said Bertha, after gazing for a minute or two at the scribbled, careless note. "The marriage is put off."

"And you knew that," cried her mother, "all the time, and never told me! And I might have missed twenty chances of letting. Really, Bertha, I never did see anything like you. There's that house standing empty month after month, and we hardly know where to turn for money, and you knew that

Mr. Franks wouldn't take it, and yet you say not a word! How can you behave in such an extraordinary way? I think you really find pleasure in worrying me. Any one would fancy you wished to see me in my grave. To think that you knew all the time!"

CHAPTER 12

There passed a fortnight. Bertha heard nothing more of Miss Elvan, till a letter arrived one morning in an envelope, showing on the back an address at Teddington. Rosamund wrote that she had just returned from Switzerland, and was staying for a few days with friends; would it be possible for Bertha to come to Teddington the same afternoon, for an hour or two's talk? The writer had so much to say that could not be conveyed in a letter, and longed above all things to see Bertha, the only being in whom, at a very grave juncture in her life, she could absolutely confide. "We shall be quite alone—Mr. and Mrs. Capron are going to town immediately after lunch. This is a lovely place, and we shall have it to ourselves all the afternoon. So don't be frightened—I know how you hate strangers—but come, come, come!"

Bertha took train early in the afternoon. By an avenue of elms she passed into a large and beautiful garden, and so came to the imposing front door. Led into the drawing-room, she had time to take breath, and to gaze at splendours such as she had never seen before; then with soundless footfall, entered a slim, prettily-dressed girl who ran towards her, and caught her hands, and kissed her with graceful tenderness.

"My dear, dear old Bertha! What a happiness to see you again! How good of you to come! Isn't it a lovely place? And the nicest people. You've heard me speak of Miss Anderton, of Bath. She is Mrs. Capron—married half a year ago. And they're just going to Egypt for a year, and—what do you think?—I'm going with them."

Rosamund's voice sunk and faltered. She stood holding Bertha's hands, and gazing into her face with eyes which grew large as if in a distressful appeal.

"To Egypt?"

"Yes. It was decided whilst I was in Switzerland. Mrs. Capron wants a friend to be with her; one who can help her in water-colours. She thought, of course, that I couldn't go; wrote to me just wishing it were possible. And I caught at the chance! Oh, caught at it!"

"That's what I don't understand," said Bertha.

"I want to explain it all. Come into this cosy corner. Nobody will disturb us except when they bring tea.—Do you know that picture of Leader's? Isn't it exquisite!—Are you tired, Bertha? You look so, a little. I'm afraid you walked from the station, and it's such a hot day. But oh, the loveliness of the trees about here! Do you remember our first walk together? You were shy, stiff; didn't feel quite sure whether you liked me or not. And I thought you—just a little critical. But before we got back again, I think we had begun to understand each other. And I wonder whether you'll understand me now. It would be dreadful if I felt you disapproved of me. Of course if you do, I'd much rather you said so. You will—won't you?"

She again fixed her eyes upon Bertha with the wide, appealing look.

"Whether I say it or not," replied the other, "you'll see what I think. I never could help that."

"That's what I love in you! And that's what I've been thinking of, all these weeks of misery—your perfect sincerity. I've asked myself whether it would be possible for you to find yourself in such a position as mine; and how you would act, how you would speak. You're my ideal of truth and rightness, Bertha; I've often enough told you that."

Bertha moved uncomfortably, her eyes averted.

"Suppose you just tell me what has happened," she added quietly.

"Yes, I will. I hope you haven't been thinking it was some fault of *his*?"

"I couldn't help thinking that."

"Oh! Put that out of your mind at once. The fault is altogether mine. He has done nothing whatever—he is good and true, and all that a man should be. It's I who am behaving badly; so badly

that I feel hot with shame now that I come to tell you. I have broken it off. I've said I couldn't marry him."

Their eyes met for an instant. Bertha looked rather grave, but with her wonted kindliness of expression; Rosamund's brows were wrinkled in distress, and her lips trembled.

"I've seen it coming since last Christmas," she continued, in a hurried, tremulous undertone. "You know he came down to Bath; that was our last meeting; and I felt that something was wrong. Ah, so hard to know oneself! I wanted to talk to you about it; but then I said to myself—what can Bertha do but tell me to know my own mind? And that's just what I couldn't come to,—to understand my own feelings. I was changing, I knew that. I dreaded to look into my own thoughts, from day to day. Above all, I dreaded to sit down and write to him. Oh, the hateful falsity of those letters—Yet what could I do, what could I do? I had no right to give such a blow, unless I felt that anything else was utterly, utterly impossible."

"And at last you did feel it?"

"In Switzerland—yes. It came like a flash of lightning. I was walking up that splendid valley—you remember my description—up toward the glacier. That morning I had had a letter, naming the very day for our marriage, and speaking of the house—your house at Putney—he meant to take. I had said to myself—'It must be; I can do nothing. I haven't the courage.' Then, as I was walking, a sort of horror fell upon me, and made me tremble; and when it passed I saw that, so far from not having the courage to break, I should never dare to go through with it. And I went back to the hotel, and sat down and wrote, without another moment's thought or hesitation."

"What else could you have done?" said Bertha, with a sigh of relief. "When it comes to horror and tremblings!"

There was a light in her eye which seemed the precursor of a smile; but her voice was not unsympathetic, and Rosamund knew that one of Bertha Cross smiles was worth more in the way of friendship than another's tragic emotion.

"Have patience with me," she continued, "whilst I try to explain it all. The worst of my position is, that so many people will know what I have done, and so few of them, hardly any one, will understand why. One can't talk to people about such things. Even Winnie and father—I'm sure they don't really understand—though I'm afraid they're both rather glad. What a wretched thing it is to be misjudged. I feel sure, Bertha, that it's just this kind of thing that makes a woman sit down and write a novel—where she can speak freely in disguise, and do herself justice. Don't you think so?"

"I shouldn't wonder," replied the listener, thoughtfully. "But does it really matter? If you know you're only doing what you must do?"

"But that's only how it seems to me. Another, in my place, would very likely see the must on the other side. Of course it's a terribly complicated thing—a situation like this. I haven't the slightest idea how one ought to be guided. One could argue and reason all day long about it—as I have done with myself for weeks past."

"Try just to tell me the reason which seems to you the strongest," said Bertha.

"That's very simple. I thought I loved him, and I find I don't."

"Exactly. But I hardly see how the change came about."

"I will try to tell you," replied Rosamund. "It was that picture, 'Sanctuary,' that began it. When I first saw it, it gave me a shock. You know how I have always thought of him—an artist living for his own idea of art, painting just as he liked, what pleased him, without caring for the public taste. I got enthusiastic; and when I saw that he seemed to care for my opinion and my praise—of course all the rest followed. He told me about his life as an art student—Paris, Rome, all that; and it was my ideal of romance. He was very poor, sometimes so poor that he hardly had enough to eat, and this made me proud of him, for I felt sure he could have got money if he would have condescended to do inferior work. Of course, as I too was poor, we could not think of marrying before his position improved. At last he painted 'Sanctuary.' He told me nothing about it. I came and saw it on the easel, nearly

finished. And—this is the shocking thing—I pretended to admire it. I was astonished, pained—yet I had the worldliness to smile and praise. There's the fault of my character. At that moment, truth and courage were wanted, and I had neither. The dreadful thing is to think that he degraded himself on my account. If I had said at once what I thought, he would have confessed—would have told me that impatience had made him untrue to himself. And from that day; oh, this is the worst of all, Bertha—he has adapted himself to what he thinks my lower mind and lower aims; he has consciously debased himself, out of thought for me. Horrible! Of course he believes in his heart that I was a hypocrite before. The astonishing thing is that this didn't cause him to turn cold to me. He must have felt that, but somehow he overcame it. All the worse! The very fact that he still cared for me shows how bad my influence has been. I feel that I have wrecked his life, Bertha—and yet I cannot give him my own, to make some poor sort of amends."

Bertha was listening with a face that changed from puzzled interest to wondering confusion.

"Good gracious!" she exclaimed when the speaker ceased. "Is it possible to get into such entanglements of reasoning about what one thinks and feels? It's beyond me. Oh they're bringing the tea. Perhaps a cup of tea will clear my wits."

Rosamund at once began to speak of the landscape by Leader, which hung near them, and continued to do so even after the servant had withdrawn. Her companion was silent, smiling now and then in an absent way. They sipped tea.

"The tea is doing me so much good," Bertha said, "I begin to feel equal to the most complicated reflections. And so you really believe that Mr. Franks is on the way to perdition, and that you are the cause of it?"

Rosamund did not reply. She had half averted her look; her brows were knit in an expression of trouble; she bit her lower lip. A moment passed, and—

"Suppose we go into the garden," she said, rising. "Don't you feel it a little close here?"

They strolled about the paths. Her companion, seeming to have dismissed from mind their subject of conversation, began to talk of Egypt, and the delight she promised herself there.

Presently Bertha reverted to the unfinished story.

"Oh, it doesn't interest you."

"Doesn't it indeed! Please go on. You had just explained all about 'Sanctuary'—which isn't really a bad picture at all."

"Oh, Bertha!" cried the other in pained protest. "That's your good nature. You never can speak severely of anybody's work. The picture is shameful, shameful! And its successor, I am too sure, will be worse still, from what I have heard of it. Oh, I can't bear to think of what it all means—Now that it's too late, I see what I ought to have done. In spite of everything and everybody I ought to have married him in the first year, when I had courage and hope enough to face any hardships. We spoke of it, but he was too generous. What a splendid thing to have starved with him—to have worked for him whilst he was working for art and fame, to have gone through and that together, and have come out triumphant! That was a life worth living. But to begin marriage at one's ease on the profits of pictures such as 'Sanctuary'—oh, the shame of it! Do you think I could face the friends who would come to see me?"

"How many friends," asked Bertha, "would be aware of your infamy? I credit myself with a little imagination. But I should never have suspected the black baseness which had poisoned your soul."

Again Rosamund bit her lip, and kept a short silence.

"It only shows," she said with some abruptness, "that I shall do better not to speak of it at all, and let people think what they like of me. If even *you* can't understand."

Bertha stood still, and spoke in a changed voice.

"I understand very well—or think I do. I'm perfectly sure that you could never have broken your engagement unless for the gravest reason—and for me it is quite enough to know that. Many a girl ought to do this, who never has the courage. Try not to worry about explanations, the thing

is done, and there's an end of it. I'm very glad indeed you're going quite away; it's the best thing possible. When do you start?" she added.

"In three days.—Listen, Bertha, I have something very serious to ask of you. It is possible— isn't it?—that he may come to see you some day. If he does, or if by chance you see him alone, and if he speaks of me, I want you to make him think—you easily can—that what has happened is all for his good. Remind him how often artists have been spoilt by marriage, and hint—you surely could—that I am rather too fond of luxury, and that kind of thing."

Bertha wore an odd smile.

"Trust me," she replied, "I will blacken you most effectually."

"You promise? But, at the same time, you will urge him to be true to himself, to endure poverty —"

"I don't know about that. Why shouldn't poor Mr. Franks have enough to eat if he can get it?"

"Well—but you promise to help him in the other way? You needn't say very bad things; just a smile, a hint—"

"I quite understand," said Bertha, nodding.

CHAPTER 13

Warburton had never seen Godfrey Sherwood so restless and excitable as during these weeks when the business in Little Ailie Street was being brought to an end, and the details of the transfer to Bristol were being settled. Had it not been inconsistent with all the hopeful facts of the situation, as well as with the man's temper, one would have thought that Godfrey suffered from extreme nervousness; that he lived under some oppressive anxiety, which it was his constant endeavour to combat with resolute high spirits. It seemed an odd thing that a man who had gone through the very real cares and perils of the last few years without a sign of perturbation, nay, with the cheeriest equanimity, should let himself be thrown into disorder by the mere change to a more promising state of things. Now and then Warburton asked himself whether his partner could be concealing some troublesome fact with regard to Applegarth's concern; but he dismissed the idea as too improbable; Sherwood was far too good a fellow, far too conscientious a man of business, to involve his friend in obvious risk—especially since it had been decided that Mrs. Warburton's and her money should go into the affair. The inquiries made by Mr. Turnbull had results so satisfactory that even the resolute pessimist could not but grudgingly admit his inability to discover storm-signals. Though a sense of responsibility made a new element in his life, which would not let him sleep quite so soundly as hitherto, Will persuaded himself that he had but to get to work, and all would be right.

The impression made upon him by Applegarth himself was very favourable. The fact that the jam manufacturer was a university man, an astronomer, and a musician, had touched Warburton's weak point, and he went down to Bristol the first time with an undeniable prejudice at the back of his mind; but this did not survive a day or two's intercourse. Applegarth recommended himself by an easy and humorous geniality of bearing which Warburton would have been the last man to resist; he talked of his affairs with the utmost frankness.

"The astonishing thing to me is," he said, "that I've made this business pay. I went into it on abstract principle. I knew nothing of business. At school, I rather think, I learnt something about 'single and double entry,' but I had forgotten it all—just as I find myself forgetting how to multiply and divide, now that I am accustomed to the higher mathematics. However, I had to earn a little money, somehow, and I thought I'd try jam. And it went by itself, I really don't understand it, mere good luck, I suppose. I hear of fellows who have tried business, and come shocking croppers. Perhaps they were classical men nothing so hopeless as your classic. I beg your pardon; before saying that, I ought to have found out whether either of you is a classic."

The listeners both shook their heads, and laughed.

"So much the better. An astronomer, it is plain, may manufacture jam; a fellow brought up on Greek and Latin verses couldn't possibly."

They were together at Bristol for a week, then Sherwood received a telegram, and told Warburton that he must return to London immediately.

"Something that bothers you?" said Will, noting a peculiar tremor on his friend's countenance.

"No, no; a private affair; nothing to do with us. You stay on till Saturday? I might be back in twenty-four hours."

"Good. Yes; I want to have some more talk with Applegarth about that advertising proposal. I don't like to start with quite such a heavy outlay."

"Nor I either," replied Godfrey, his eyes wandering. He paused, bit the end of his moustache, and added. "By the bye, the St. Neots money will be paid on Saturday, you said?"

"I believe so. Or early next week."

"That's right. I want to get done. Queer how these details fidget me. Nerves! I ought to have had a holiday this summer. You were wiser."

The next day Warburton went out with Applegarth to his house some ten miles south of Bristol, and dined there, and stayed over night. It had not yet been settled where he and Sherwood should have their permanent abode; there was a suggestion that they should share a house which was to let not far from Applegarth's, but Will felt uneasy at the thought of a joint tenancy, doubting whether he could live in comfort with any man. He was vexed at having to leave his flat in Chelsea, which so thoroughly suited his habits and his tastes.

Warburton and his host talked much of Sherwood.

"When I first met him," said the jam-manufacturer, "he struck me as the queerest man of business—except myself—that I had ever seen. He talked about Norse sagas, witchcraft, and so on, and when he began about business, I felt uneasy. Of course I know him better now."

"There are not many steadier and shrewder men than Sherwood," remarked Will.

"I feel sure of that," replied the other. And he added, as if to fortify himself in the opinion: "Yes, I feel sure of it."

"In spite of all his energy, never rash."

"No, no; I can see that. Yet," added Applegarth, again as if for self-confirmation, "he has energy of an uncommon kind."

"That will soon show itself," replied Warburton, smiling. "He's surveying the field like a general before battle."

"Yes. No end of bright ideas. Some of them—perhaps—not immediately practicable."

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

Текст предоставлен ООО «ЛитРес».

Прочитайте эту книгу целиком, [купив полную легальную версию](#) на ЛитРес.

Безопасно оплатить книгу можно банковской картой Visa, MasterCard, Maestro, со счета мобильного телефона, с платежного терминала, в салоне МТС или Связной, через PayPal, WebMoney, Яндекс.Деньги, QIWI Кошелек, бонусными картами или другим удобным Вам способом.