

MISS BROWN

A NOVEL

BY

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IN THREE VOLUMES

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BOOK II.

CHAPTER I.

WALTER HAMLIN did not go to America. On leaving the Villa Arnolfini, he met at Florence some artist friends, who, in his condition of utter absence of plans, easily drew him on with them to Siena⁸⁵ and Perugia,⁸⁶ thence into the smaller Umbrian⁸⁷ cities, and finally into a wholly unexplored region between the Abruzzo and the Adriatic.⁸⁸ By the time that their sketching and article-writing expedition was at an end, the winter had come round, and more than three months had elapsed since Hamlin had parted with the Perrys. Would Hamlin return with his friends to England? He had often said that he had had enough of Italy – that he would go home and shut himself up in his studio at Hammer-smith, among smoke and river-fogs, seeing not a living creature, learning Persian and studying Sufi⁸⁹ poets until next spring, when he would set off for the East, never more to return to Europe, except for the Grosvenor private view. But when the moment for return north approached, Hamlin began to hesitate; and the very day before his friends' departure, he informed them that he had come to the conclusion that there was still some work for him to do in Italy.

'I shall be in England at the end of two months at latest,' he said.

And on their remonstrating at his fickleness, he merely answered –

'I have a notion for a new picture, and I think I have found my model for it.'

'The Queen of Night' in your portfolio,' suggested one of his friends,

They had noticed and generally admired that strange head, the like of which none of them had ever seen before, and they had given the drawing, which Hamlin described merely as 'a girl near Lucca,' the nickname of 'The Queen of Night.'

'Yes,' answered Hamlin, 'that's the one I'm thinking about.'

So the rest of the party set sail from Civita Vecchia;⁹⁰ and one drizzly, foggy morning, Hamlin got into the train to carry him northward to Florence.

During those three months, he could scarcely himself have explained when or how, strange notions had come into Hamlin's head, and a still stranger plan

had finally matured in it. He had been haunted by the remembrance of the Perrys' nurse-maid at the Villa Arnolfini, and gradually taken to brooding and daydreaming about her. He had made up his mind that Anne Brown was the most beautiful girl, in the strangest style, whom he had ever met. What was to be her future? Of two possibilities one must be realised. Either this magnificent blossom was to be untimely nipped, – this beautiful and strange girl was to fritter away her life, unnoticed, wasted, to little by little lose her beauty, her dignity, her grandeur, her whole imaginative aroma; or the rare plant of beauty was to be cherished, nursed into perfection, till it burst out in maturity of splendour, a thing of delight for the present and of wonder for the future. Either Anne Brown must turn into a sordid nursery-governess, or into the avowedly most beautiful woman in England – that is to say, in the particular pre-Raphaelite society which constituted England to him.

Yet not necessarily; there was still a middle course – she might marry some small shopkeeper or teacher of languages at Florence; or, perhaps, some artist might notice her, make her his mistress, perhaps his wife. This last thought of Anne Brown as the possible wife of some other Melton Perry (for they were all Melton Perrys at Florence) filled Hamlin with a vague disgust and irritation. Much better that she should end her life as a nursery-maid, or a daily governess at a franc the hour. Still, it was dreadful to think that something so unique should be lost, wasted for ever. 'Such things must be,' said Hamlin to himself; 'it is sad, but it can't be helped.' And he wrote two sonnets, 'Lost Loveliness,' and 'Stillborn Joy,'⁹¹ which were extremely beautiful, and quite among the finest he ever wrote. But this did not despatch the subject. The sense of having made the most of the fact that this loveliness was to be wasted, this joy of beauty to be stillborn, did not make up for the consciousness that the waste, the abortion, had not actually taken place, might yet be prevented, and were dreadful in themselves. Was he, Hamlin, to marry Anne Brown? He shrank in terror from so Quixotic,⁹² and at the same time so commonplace, so school-girlish a thought. But if he did not marry her no other man could; at least, no other man who was to prevent the act of wastefulness to be consummated. She might marry a clerk, a shopkeeper, even a servant, or even some miserable little Anglo-Florentine artist; but if she married a man above that, a man to appreciate and make the most of her, that man must evidently be himself. It is difficult to follow the logic of this notion; but certain it is that Hamlin never doubted for a second that either Anne Brown must bloom for him and by him, must be his most precious possession and his most precious loan to the world – or that Anne Brown must be simply and deliberately buried under a bushel. Such arguments are matters of character, I suppose; be it as it may, the argument was absolutely cogent.

When Hamlin had got thus far he stopped for a long time, revolving the matter in his mind in a purely abstract way, without attempting to realise how

things might be settled. He was not a man of action or of resolves, and would usually let things slip on and look at them slipping; and during this ruminating condition, he did not once seriously ask himself whether he intended marrying the Perrys' nursemaid. But suddenly, the very day before his friends were to carry him back to England, a new notion came into his head. His life seemed suddenly filled with romance. The matter was settled in a minute. Anne Brown was to be filched triumphantly from oblivion: he telegraphed Perry to hire him rooms in Florence. As the meeting of certain chemical substances will sometimes produce a new and undreamt-of something of wholly unprecedented properties, so ideas had come in collision in Hamlin's mind, and out of a mere perplexity had arisen a stranger scheme – out of the question what should be the fate of Anne Brown, had originated the decision what was to be the future of Walter Hamlin. The situations seemed changed: instead of his being a mere possible, but by no means probable, instrument of a change in her life, she was the predestined instrument for the consummation of his life. Anne Brown should live for the world and for fame; and Walter Hamlin's life should be crowned by gradually endowing with vitality, and then wooing, awakening the love of this beautiful Galatea whose soul he had moulded, even as Pygmalion had moulded the limbs of the image which he had made to live and to love.⁹³ The idea, once present to Hamlin's mind, had been accepted at once; and in another hour he had worked out all the details of the real romance in which he was embarking; he had determined exactly where he would send Anne Brown to school, where he would go during her stay there, what settlements he would make to ensure her complete freedom of choice when she should choose him, in what part of London he would buy a house for her, which of his female relations should have charge of her, by whom she should be introduced into artistic society; – he began to imagine all the details of his long courtship. Beyond the courtship, into their actual married life, his fancy did not carry him; it was that year, or two or three years of gradually growing devotion, upon which he cared to dwell. Whether such a scheme was wise or right it never occurred to him to question. He had determined on educating, wooing, and marrying a woman like what Anne Brown seemed to be, as a man might determine to buy a house in a particular fishing or hunting district – the only thing is to make sure whether the particular house is the suitable house. The only further concern of Hamlin was to make sure that Anne Brown was really all that she seemed to him to be; and Hamlin looked forward as to a kind of preliminary romance to the strange inspection, this minute examination of a creature who should never guess the extraordinary metamorphosis which might, or might not, be in store for her.

CHAPTER II.

A WEEK later Hamlin was painting Anne Brown in a studio which he had hired for three months. She had manifested some pleasure when, unexpectedly, Mrs Perry had told her of his return, and of his desire to have her once more for a model; but the manifestation thereof was so calm, or rather so mingled with her usual haughty indifference, that her romantic and passionate mistress had forthwith made up her mind that Anne Brown was a mere soulless body, and communicated that fact to her husband.

'I don't see why Annie should be particularly delighted at the prospect of sitting for two hours, twice a-week, with her head raised and her throat outstretched, in a beastly cold studio,' answered Perry, affecting, as he frequently did, from a curious kind of coyness, not to understand his wife's underlying meaning.

'She is a mere soulless body,' repeated Mrs Perry – 'as indifferent to Hamlin as a handsome cow would be.'

'Do you expect her to throw herself into Hamlin's arms?' cried Perry, angrily.

'I expect her,' answered Mrs Perry, with a kind of haughty mystery and sadness, 'to be a woman.'

'And I expect you to attend to her remaining what she is – an honest girl,' retorted Perry.

'Melton!' said his wife solemnly; and immediately poor Perry's principles drooped like a furled sail.

Melton Perry had always an uncomfortable feeling of responsibility regarding Anne Brown; a sort of sense that, as poor old Miss Curzon had been grievously mistaken in intrusting a girl like Anne Brown to a lady so mystical and romantic as his wife, he, on his part, hardened sinner, social wreck as he doubtless was, was in duty bound to make up for the good old woman's want of discernment. If it had been any one except Hamlin, he repeated to himself, he would never have permitted a single sitting; but Hamlin was a Sir Galahad⁹⁴ – at least with regard to servant girls and suchlike – who had always struck Perry dumb with wonder; and in this instance in particular, Hamlin seemed really to consider Anne Brown much in the light of a picture by an old master. Yet even thus, it had taken him by surprise, and relieved his mind of a heavy weight, when, the day before the first sitting in the studio, Hamlin had asked Mrs Perry to tell him of some elderly woman – some former housekeeper or nurse in an English family – who could come to his studio and keep it in order two or three times a-week.

'I can recommend you a most delightful young laundress,' exclaimed Mrs Perry with fervour – 'quite a Palma Vecchio.'⁹⁵

‘Thank you,’ answered Hamlin, drily; ‘I particularly want an elderly woman who can take charge of my things, and who can be there when – I mean, who can take Miss Brown’s bonnet and shawl when she comes to sit to me.’

Mrs Perry confessed to no knowledge of such a person, but sat down to write to the German deaconesses, – ‘such real saints,’ – in quest of the desired piece of elderly respectability. But when she had gone to her writing-table, Melton Perry kicked Hamlin’s foot under the table, and said in an undertone –

‘You are a damned moral dog, certainly, Wat. Thank you so much, old fellow.’

So the old housekeeper was hired to go three times a-week to Hamlin’s studio, and twice a-week she opened the studio door to Anne Brown, and took the girl’s poke-bonnet and grey shawl in the little anteroom, crammed full of dwarf orange-trees, which opened into the pillared balcony circling round the topmost floor of the old palace, and from which you looked into the lichened court, and saw the steel-like sheen of the water in the well. Hamlin had determined to embody one of his usual mystical fancies in his new picture. His pictures came to him first as poems, and he had written a sonnet descriptive of his intended work before he had painted a stroke of it. It was called *Venus Victrix*;⁹⁶ and the strangeness, the mysteriousness which gave a charm to his beautiful church-window-like pictures, and made one forget for a minute the uncertainty of drawing and the weakness of flesh-painting – this essential quality of the pictorial riddle depended very much upon the fact that his *Venus Victrix* was entirely unlike any other *Venus Victrix* which the mind of man could conceive. Instead of the naked goddess triumphing over the apple of Paris,⁹⁷ whom such a name would lead you to expect, Hamlin made a sketch of a lady in a dress of sad-coloured green and gold brocade, seated in a melancholy landscape of distant barren peaks, suffused with the grey and yellow tints of a late sunset; behind her was a bower of sea-coloured palms, knotting their boughs into a kind of canopy for her head, and in her hand she held, dragged despondingly on the ground, a broken palm-branch. The expression of the goddess of Love,⁹⁸ since such she was, was one of intense melancholy. It was one of those pictures which go to the head with a perfectly unintelligible mystery, and which absolutely preclude all possibility of inquiring into their exact meaning. A picture which might have been one of Hamlin’s best, only that it was never finished.

For, it must be remembered, the picture, or rather the painting of it, was merely an excuse invented by Hamlin for an opportunity of seeing, of examining, the creature whose future was in his hands. He wished to assure himself that Anne Brown was really the Anne Brown of his fancy; and as he stared at that strange and beautiful face, it was not in reality with the object of transferring it on to his canvas, but to make sure whether it was really as strange as it seemed to him. It was also to gauge whatever mystery there might be hidden in that singu-

lar nature. Whether he ever did gauge it, it is impossible to tell. There was, he felt, something strange there – something which corresponded with the magnificent and mysterious outside, – a possibility of thought and emotion enclosed like the bud in its case of young leaves – a potential passion, good or bad, of some sort. At Anne Brown's actual character it was difficult to get; or rather, perhaps, there was as yet but little actual character to get at. He became more and more persuaded, as he sat opposite to her, painting and talking – or, interrupting the sitting, playing to her strange songs which he had picked up in his travels, and fragments of forgotten operas which it was his mania to collect – that Anne Brown was in reality much younger than her years; that beneath those solemn features there was a still immature soul wrapped up in mere conventional ideas of right and wrong, a few inherited republican formulae, and a natural pride which had grown, as does any-protecting skin, physical or moral, where surroundings are for ever chafing and wearing. A soul, above all, which had never yet sought for an ideal – had never loved; and this knowledge was to Hamlin a source of infinite satisfaction.

It was a satisfaction, also, to notice how, little by little, whatever ideals seemed to bud in Anne Brown's mind, were connected with him, or at least with the things which he presented to her imagination. Nay, with himself, as a person not at all, but yet with the books, the music, the pictures about which he talked to her. This studio, so unlike the bleak and tobacco-reeking workshop of Melton Perry, with its curious carved furniture, its Japanese screens, its bits of brocade and tapestry (rubbish which Hamlin would have blushed at in London), its shelves of books and chipped majolica and glass, its quantity of flowers, was evidently a sort of earthly paradise to the girl. And the handsome, pale, serious young man, with womanishly regular feature and world-worn look, who treated her with a sort of protecting deference, who instructed her in what she ought to like and dislike, and at the same time asked with real earnestness for her opinion, was evidently its affable archangel. This Hamlin perceived to his pleasure; but, nevertheless, he perceived also that all feeling, all ideas, were in Anne Brown vague, immature, or merely potential – unless, indeed, this tragic-looking creature repressed and drowned in the darkness of her consciousness anything more definite and developed.

They did not talk very much, for they were both of them rather taciturn; but what they said acquired therefrom more than doubled importance. And of this talking Hamlin did by far the greater share. Anne Brown had indeed little to say – a nursery-maid of nineteen has not much to tell a fashionable poet-painter of thirty-one: slight descriptions of places she had been to, villas, or bathing-places, and one or two excursions from them; vague reminiscences of old Miss Curzon, of the books which she had made the girl read, the music she had heard, the anecdotes of Landot⁹⁹ and Rossini and Malibran¹⁰⁰ which the old lady had nar-

rated; a few allusions, short and passionate, to her father; a few more, sullen and dreary, to her own future life; – that was all that poor Anne Brown could say.

For when he told her the plots of novels, and repeated scraps of poems to her, she scarcely ventured to give him her opinion. She was so earnest that she felt that only something worth saying should be said; and what things worth saying could she say to him?

‘By the way,’ said Hamlin one day, as she stood, tying her bonnet, and looking out over the sea of shingly roofs, the sudden gaps showing shady gardens far below, open *loggias*,¹⁰¹ between whose columns fluttered linen, and irregular rows of windows with herbs in broken ewers on their sills – ‘by the way, you have never told me how you liked the “Vita Nuova,” Miss Brown.’ He had talked of so many books, making her wonder and sometimes laugh at his account of them, but never about that, nor about his own.

‘It is very beautiful,’ she said, still looking out of the window – ‘but do you think it is true?’

‘Why not?’ he said.

‘I don’t know – I don’t think there are men like that;’ then she suddenly added, with a sort of melancholy humorous laugh, which was frequent with her, ‘I will make my pupils read it when I am a *parlatrice*. Those ladies will tell me their opinion.’

Hamlin was looking at her, as she still turned her massive head, with its waves of iron-black hair, away from him, towards the light.

‘Good-bye,’ she said, with her hand on the door-latch.

‘Stop a minute,’ said Hamlin; and going to a book-shelf, he got down a little green-bound volume.

‘I don’t know why,’ he said, ‘but I should like you to read these. It is idiotic trash after the “Vita Nuova” – but it is mine.’

‘Thank you,’ she said. ‘I will bring it you back next sitting. I will cover the binding.’

‘I want you to keep it. Won’t you do me that favour?’

She reddened all over her pale face.

‘Thank you,’ she said. ‘It is very good of you.’

CHAPTER III.

IT so happened that as Anne Brown was walking quickly home she was overtaken by Melton Perry.

‘What’s that book, Annie?’ he inquired, as they walked side by side.

‘Mr Hamlin gave it me – it’s his poems.’

‘Let me see.’ Perry was more peremptory than usual.

He turned over the leaves as they went along, and then returned it to her.

'You may read that,' he said – 'it's sad trash, but you may read it. All poetry isn't fit for women to read,' he added, by way of explanation.

The gift of this book somehow disturbed Perry's equanimity.

'What made him give you that book?' he asked.

'I don't know, sir. We were talking about the "Vita Nuova."'

'A lot of confounded medieval twaddle,' cried Perry. 'Why don't you read "Lady Audley's Secret"¹⁰² or "The Heir of Redclyffe"?¹⁰³ that's the right sort of thing.'

She seemed hurt, and they were silent. Suddenly Perry said, with some roughness –

'I'm sorry to inconvenience Hamlin, but this will be the last of the sittings. I am going to send you to the sea-side with the children in a day or two. Little May needs change of air. When you return, Mr Hamlin will be leaving Florence.'

'Yes, sir,' answered Anne Brown; and a kind of suppressed spasm passed across her face.

Perry saw it.

'It's high time,' he said to himself.

Melton Perry could not screw up his courage till he and his wife and Hamlin had already finished dinner that evening.

'I say, Hamlin,' he began, lighting his pipe, while Mrs Perry artistically twisted a cigarette in her long brown fingers – 'd'you think you could finish off that picture with only one more sitting? I'm sure Mrs Perry thinks it is time for the children to go down to the sea-side – only, of course, she doesn't like disturbing you in your work.'

'Go down to the sea-side!' exclaimed Mrs Perry, not at all mollified by her husband's deference; 'who talks of going to the seaside? and what has that to do with his work?'

'You forget, my dear, that you said this morning that May requires change of air – and, of course, Annie will be required to take the children down to Viareggio.¹⁰⁴ I am extremely sorry for you, old fellow, but I fear you must finish that picture – at least so far as Annie is concerned – by the beginning of next week.'

'I see,' answered Hamlin, briefly. For the first time in his life almost, he felt angry with his old friend; an unspeakable resentment at this interference with what he considered already as his.

'I see nothing of the sort,' burst out Mrs Perry; 'I will never, never permit dear Hamlin's masterpiece to be spoilt. I would rather take the children to the sea-side myself – oh yes. I would rather they did not go at all. My children are the dearest things I possess, but I have no right selfishly to prefer their welfare to the completion of such a picture. I should never forgive myself. That unfinished picture, that strange, terrible Venus, would haunt me in my dreams, and I should

hear the whole world asking me, "What have you done with a thing meant for our joy?"

'Bosh!' cried Perry, stretching out his legs and puffing at his pipe – 'rubbish! A fine thing if May gets low fever again: much you'll think of Hamlin's masterpiece then.'

'May shall not have fever,' answered Mrs Perry, haughtily; 'and Hamlin's masterpiece, which you choose to sneer at –'

'Oh, please, don't bother about my masterpieces!' interposed Hamlin.

'– Shall not be sacrificed. You shall take the children to the sea-side, Melton; and Annie shall continue to give him as many sittings as he may wish.' And then, passing over her husband's nauseous existence, she began a mellifluous and irrelevant conversation with Hamlin across him.

But after two or three minutes Perry could stand it no longer.

'Damn your sea-side!' he suddenly burst out.

'Melton!' shrieked Mrs Perry, falling back on her chair.

'Damn your sea-side!' repeated Perry. 'Haven't you eyes in your head to understand that the sea-side has nothing to do with the matter? The children no more require to go to Viareggio than I require to be made Khan of Tartary.¹⁰⁵ What is required is that an honest girl, who was intrusted to us by an old friend, should not get to be talked of as a –'

'This loathsome coarseness is too much for me. Adieu, Mr Hamlin!' and Mrs Perry flounced out of the room.

'Lord deliver us from womankind!' exclaimed Perry, as the door shut upon his wife, and he fell back in his chair. 'What a nice breakfast I shall have to-morrow!'

Hamlin did not answer, but merely lit another cigarette, and looked into the smouldering fire.

'Hamlin, old boy,' resumed Perry, 'don't be down upon me. I really am profoundly sorry to bother you – indeed I am; but – you see – about this girl –'

'I understand,' answered Hamlin, shortly; 'don't let's talk about it.'

'But – please don't be in a rage with me, Watty,' cried Perry, appealingly; 'really I don't know what to do. You see, it's not as if she were an ordinary girl or an ordinary servant; then I should say – hang it, please yourself!'

'Sweet morals!' sneered Hamlin.

'But with her it's different; I'm sure you must recognise that yourself. Now I don't mean to say you are in the least to blame, or that the girl cares the least scrap about you; but still, this sort of thing won't do. I know you're the last man to do a dirty thing – indeed you're the only man whom I would have permitted to go on so long. But then, quite without meaning anything, all that sitting, and talking, and discussing poetry and "Vita Nuova" together – without knowing it, it puts ideas into a girl's head, makes her dissatisfied, that sort of thing, and the

result is that she goes to the bad. And then, here in Florence especially, a girl's none the better looked at for having sat, if even only to one man. People begin to talk (at the villa it was another matter), stories go round, and it becomes difficult for her to get a respectable situation.'

'You needn't say any more,' cried Hamlin, with almost feminine impatience. All this gave him a sense of moral nausea.

'You understand, old fellow, I don't mean it about you in particular,' persisted Perry; 'indeed you've behaved like Sir Bors,¹⁰⁶ Sir Percival,¹⁰⁷ and Sir Galahad all rolled into one. But it's the fatality of the circumstances, the beastly world about us. You're not angry, are you, with me?'

'Not a bit,' answered Hamlin, quietly, minutely examining one of the pictures on the wall, which was not worth looking at, and had been thoroughly looked at by him already; 'not a bit, my dear Perry. I suppose you have no objection to Miss Brown giving me one more morning?'

'Not the least – two, or even three, for the matter of that. I was only anxious not to spin out things indefinitely.'

'One more sitting will be more than enough,' answered Hamlin. 'By the way, before I go, I want to do a drawing of little Mildred.'

CHAPTER IV.

It was a cold and drizzling February morning that last sitting which Anne Brown was to give to Walter Hamlin. As the girl slowly mounted the well-like stairs of the old tower palace, and saw the distant snow-covered hills through the dim windows on the landings, she thought with sadness that this was the last time she should toil up to Hamlin's studio. A lethargy weighed upon her, making her feel that everything was dreary and unreal, such as she had experienced only once or twice before, when one of the few holidays of her childhood had drawn to a close. The cheerless, colourless, eventless, joyless routine of ordinary life was about to close over, to engulf, her little island of brightness. She was longer than usual taking off her bonnet and cloak in the anteroom filled with orange-trees, for she felt as if she must look at everything well one last time – at the bits of brocade and the photographs on the wall, the plaster-casts on the shelf, the scarlet and purple anemones in the cracked china bowl, the brass synagogue lamp hanging in the window.

'It is bad weather,' said Hamlin's old housekeeper.

'Horrible,' answered Anne, looking vacantly through the window at the grey sky and wet roofs.

The old woman opened the studio door and drew the curtains. Hamlin, who was at a table writing, rose and came to meet his model.

'It is very good of you to come in such horrible weather, Miss Brown,' he said.

'It is the last sitting – I thought I ought not to miss it,' and she sat down at once in the arm-chair of faded green velvet opposite Hamlin's easel.

'Won't you warm yourself a little?' he asked.

'No, thank you; I am not cold.'

Hamlin began to prepare his paints.

'You are going to Viareggio, Miss Brown,' he remarked.

'Yes; I believe I am.'

'You will enjoy the change of air. The sea – you told me you liked the sea one day,' – and he went on squeezing the paints on to his palette.

'I suppose so.' She said no more.

Hamlin was seated before his easel, looking now at his work and now at her, and making minute alterations with a small brush. They did not talk much. He seemed bent upon his work. He had told her that she need not keep her head in position, as he was merely finishing some unimportant details. Her eyes wandered round the room – at the books, the sketches on the wall, the rugs under foot. On the chimney-piece was stuck a photograph of Melton Perry. If only she might have a photograph of Hamlin! ... For less than a second she thought she might beg for one; then it seemed to her impossible, and the wish beat itself painfully against that cold, dead impossibility, like a bird against its cage-bars.

Hamlin called the old woman –

'Take that letter to the post-office at the Uffizi,'¹⁰⁸ he said, pointing to his writing-table, 'and mind you get it registered.'

It was the first time that Hamlin had sent the old woman on an errand during one of Anne Brown's sittings, when she was wont to go in and out of the studio noiselessly, like a watchful duenna.

The heavy stairs door banged behind her. Anne listened to it dully, vacantly, as one listens to things when deeply preoccupied. For a few minutes Hamlin worked on in silence, then suddenly, without looking up, he said –

'Do you remember my finding your "Dante" in the vineyard at the Villa Arnolfini, Miss Brown?'

'Yes,' she answered.

'And you told me that you wished to fit yourself to be a teacher?'

'Yes, I remember.'

'Well,' went on Hamlin, 'I have been thinking about that; and I think it would be a pity – I mean – I hope you won't think it horribly rude of me to say so – I think it would be better if you went to school for a little while yourself.'

Anne stared at this speech, and at the close of it her surprise turned to resentment.

'Of course it would be better,' she said, bitterly; 'of course I shall always be very ignorant; but I have no wish to set up for what I am not. I am not going to teach people anything – only to correct their pronunciation and a few mistakes. One does not require to study much for that, and I shall be competent to do it.'

In her quiet, subdued way she looked very angry.

Hamlin rose from his easel.

'You misunderstand me,' he said; 'and indeed what I have to say is so strange and perhaps so unjustifiable, that you have every right to do so. Listen,' and he drew a chair near hers.

'Please do not think me very bold, and forgive the horrid way in which I am forced to put things, when I tell you, dear Miss Brown, that I am very much interested in you, and, indeed – will you forgive a comparative stranger saying so? – that I have never felt so much attracted by any one as I do by you.'

Anne Brown did not answer; she seemed literally petrified by sheer astonishment.

'The time has come when our acquaintance must come to an end,' went on Hamlin, rapidly; 'but I cannot let this happen without making an effort to prolong it. I have no brothers or sisters – no one, at least, living with me, except distant relations. I have never taken much interest in anybody. But now I want to know – would you, instead of our parting company altogether – would you let me become your guardian for the next few years, and as such, would you let me take charge of your education and send you to school? It seems a very ridiculous thing to suggest. But still you must not be angry with me for doing so.'

Anne's big onyx eyes had opened wider and wider. She flushed purple in the middle of his speech, then turned ashy-white, while she picked convulsively at the fringe of the armchair. Then suddenly a sort of convulsion came across her face, and, as if from sheer unbearable tension of feeling, she burst into tears.

She gave way only one second, immediately trying to stop herself, but in vain. Hamlin felt that he was making a horrible mess of it. He came close up to the chair where the poor girl was thrown back, shaken with sobs.

'Miss Brown,' he cried, taking her hand – 'Anne – oh, don't be unhappy! I did not mean to offend you. Don't you understand my meaning? I wish you to be what you have a right to be. I wish you to be in such a position that of all the men in the world you may choose the one who deserves you most. Anne, I love you – and I hope that perhaps some day you may love me; but I want you to be able to love whoever may best deserve you, and merely to do my best that you should care for me. I want you to have a future independent of me – to possess the education and the fortune which shall enable you to marry whomsoever you will, or not to marry at all. Will you let me, for the time being, be your guardian, your father, your brother; let me provide for you, take care of your money, see to

your education? I do not ask you to love me, but merely to give me a chance of trying to make you prefer me.'

Anne did not cease sobbing; and every convulsive heaving of her body made Hamlin feel a sort of sickening terror. He slid down on his knees and kissed her hand.

This action seemed suddenly to awaken her. She started up, and making a tremendous effort, stopped her crying.

He stood aside while she went to the mirror and looked at her swollen eyes and convulsed face.

'May I have a glass of water?' she asked; then, stopping Hamlin, 'never mind,' she said – 'never mind – I must go;' and she pulled her blue veil hurriedly over her eyes and huddled on her cloak.

'Miss Brown,' cried Hamlin, 'why don't you answer me?' and he laid hold of her arm as she was about to open the door.

'Because you do not deserve it,' she answered, trying to loosen his grasp. 'Let me go, please.'

'I cannot let you go,' answered Hamlin calmly, standing before the door, 'until you have listened to me. Will you let me provide for your future, send you to school, and then place you in the care of my aunt? Will you let me act as if I were your guardian for the next three years, and at the end of them you shall have enough to live and marry as befits a lady, and be as free as air, or become my wife – whichever you shall choose? Answer me, for I am serious.'

Anne Brown paused.

'Don't ask me for an answer now,' she said; 'I am not sure that you are in earnest.'

'I am – indeed I am!' cried Hamlin; 'I have intended asking you this ever since my return to Florence. I returned merely in order to ask you. I am in earnest; cannot you give me a serious answer?'

'Not now – I can't think about anything; I must ask; I don't know what is right to do.'

He opened the door, and Anne Brown walked out rapidly, through the ante-room and downstairs.

CHAPTER V.

FOR a long time Anne Brown remained as it were dazed, as if she had received a blow on the head. When she got back to the Perrys' house, she felt broken in all her limbs, and slipped up-stairs and threw herself on her bed. But it was no use: all that day, while attending on the children and doing her usual work, she felt as if some one else were doing it all; while she remained conscious only of something very sudden and strange, of a confused buzzing in her brain, through

which she heard the voice of Hamlin repeating his words in the studio; words which somehow made her indignant, angry, and at the same time filled her with a sense of having done something which she should not. This feeling increased at night, and she lay awake while the clocks struck hour after hour, hot, red, half deafened by her own blood, fevered and vaguely indignant. It was as if Hamlin had struck her; she felt insulted, outraged, by this strange interference with her fate, this wonderful intrusion of excitement into her dull and sombre life. It was dawn when she awoke: a chill greyness in the sky, reddened by the pale winter sun. She knew that something had happened, that something was changed. She was almost surprised to find herself in her usual room, with the children's tea-sets on the chest of drawers, the coloured pictures from the 'Illustrated' and the 'Graphic'¹⁰⁹ pinned on the walls, the dolls' houses in the corner, and little May asleep by her side in her crib. Then she remembered it all, and sat up in her bed thinking about it. Things appeared to her in quite a new light. She had been an ungrateful beast to feel as she had towards Hamlin; and a great wave of gratitude and awe, and love and joy, welled up in her heart. It was as if she were sitting in the sunshine: an indefinable kind of happiness. How noble and generous and good he had been; and how doubly so, being so great, and she being a mere nothing in the world! Whether he loved her or she him, she did not ask herself; it seemed a thing to die of for sheer happiness, that any one should care for her and her future. And just in proportion to her usual pride, and sullenness, and joylessness, she felt happy in the idea of deserving nothing and receiving everything, from his kindness: and Hamlin, with whom she had spoken not twenty-four hours earlier, whom she would see again that day, appeared to her as a distant, dim, ineffable creature, lighting and warming her like the sun, but equally unapproachable. But on thinking it over, things came round to commonplace actuality. What was she to do? Would he ask her again? or even, had he asked her at all? It all seemed a dream, and she did not venture to examine into its reality. She determined to tell it all to Perry, and ask his advice; but she felt as if she never could. She met Perry several times in the course of the morning, but she could not succeed in screwing up her courage. What if it should all prove to be an illusion? She took the children out for their accustomed walk, during which she was even more silent than usual. On returning home she saw Hamlin in the street, close to the door. The blood all rushed up to her head. Hamlin saluted her as if nothing had happened, and accompanied her up-stairs. When they were at the landing he suddenly turned to her –

'Have you thought over our conversation in the studio yesterday, Miss Brown?' he asked.

'Yes,' answered Anne, inaudibly, as he stood with his hand on the bell; 'I have.'

‘Well, then,’ went on Hamlin, ‘with regard to the plan which I submitted to you, what is your answer? Do you consent or not?’

Anne Brown raised her head.

‘I consent,’ she answered quietly, looking full at him, as if to make sure that she was not talking in a dream. He had never seen her so beautiful and majestic before; and she had a look – with dilated eyes, and rapid, oppressed breath – like the one which he had noticed once when she talked of her father, and of which he had felt at once, ‘this is what I want.’

‘Thank you,’ he answered gravely, and rang the bell. For a moment they stood in silence, till the door was opened.

CHAPTER VI.

HAMLIN sat for some time in the dusty attic called a studio, while Perry cut acrobats and devils out of black paper, and stuck them on the dirty window-panes.

‘That’s my vocation,’ said Perry, ‘and not painting damned landscape spinach and soap-sud seas. Look! aren’t they jolly old fiends?’ and he held up a group of black clowns, standing on each other’s hands and shoulders.

‘Capital!’ answered Hamlin. ‘But look here; I came to tell you something. I want the address of Miss Brown’s guardian, – you told me there was one, – because I am going to have Miss Brown educated, with a view, if she do not change her mind, to her becoming my wife.’

Perry let his scissors fall on the floor.

‘Damnation!’ he cried.

Hamlin picked up the scissors and put them quietly on the table.

‘So that’s it!’ burst out Perry, ‘While I was bothering my brains with trying to take care of Anne, you were being inveigled by that cursed hypocritical slut.’

‘I shall be obliged to you to speak in rather different language, Perry,’ said Hamlin, in a tone of voice and with a manner which his friend was not accustomed to.

‘Oh, beast! brute! seven-times-distilled and most-kickable jackass that I have been,’ moaned Perry, ‘that I should have let this happen to you! – that I should have let you be entrapped under my very nose! But it mustn’t be, old fellow; I won’t stand it.’

‘You will have to,’ answered Hamlin, contemptuously; ‘and so, let’s say no more about it. Only one word: Miss Brown has not inveigled me.’

Perry gave a sort of moan of disgust. ‘No woman ever does inveigle a man!’

‘Miss Brown has not inveigled me. I conceived the desire of educating her, and giving myself a chance of marrying her if she would have me, long ago, before I returned to Florence. And, as a favour, I beg you will respect Miss Brown so

long as she remains in your house, as you would respect the woman who is at present my ward, and may possibly become my wife.'

'Ward! wife! fiddlesticks!' cried Perry. 'For God's sake, my dearest old Watty, don't go and do such a damnable thing! don't be such an idiot as to suppose you must do it. That was my confounded folly: let myself be led on, and then thought it was my own choice, my resolution, all sorts of fine things. No man ever really wants to tie himself up; it's the woman who does it, and makes him believe it's himself. All this is bosh, mere bosh; you'll think better of it.'

'I tell you again, Perry, that there is no inveigling about the matter. I made up my mind to this step while I was away from Florence. Besides, I am not going to marry Miss Brown straight off; I am going to give her the education which such a woman deserves, to enable her to marry me should she care to do so.'

'Education, forsooth!' groaned Perry; 'you will get yourself married before you have time to say Jack Robinson:¹¹⁰ and to think that I have brought it all upon you! to think that I have driven you to do it!'

Hamlin could not help smiling at his friend's distress.

'Really, you need not feel under any responsibility. I alone am responsible in the business – I and good fortune, which has brought me into the presence of the most marvellous woman that ever was –'

'But what do you do it for? You're not in love with Annie, I do believe,' cried poor Perry.

'I do it because she is the most beautiful woman I have ever seen,' answered Hamlin, deliberately; 'and the woman who, properly educated, is of all others the one whom I should most wish to love – because, in short, I cannot see her wasted.'

Perry flung his arms over his head with a gesture of grotesque despair. At that moment the door opened, and Mrs Perry entered the studio.

'What is the matter? what has happened?' she asked with a dramatic gesture, and a not less dramatic accent; and she remained standing on the threshold, raising the door-curtain with much dignity.

'Hamlin wants to bring up and marry Anne Brown,' yelled Perry.

Mrs Perry tottered, let the curtain go, held her hand to her head for a moment.

'Anne Brown – do you hear that? He wants to marry her! to educate her! He has already proposed!' repeated Perry.

Mrs Perry came forward solemnly, and stretched out her hand to Hamlin.

'Dear friend,' she said softly, 'my heart told me that this would be.'

'Fudge!' exclaimed Perry; 'if it did, why the deuce didn't you interfere?'

'My heart told me this would be. I congratulate you, dearest friend, that you have at last found the embodiment of your mysterious dreams of beauty. And I thank you, on my part, for giving me the happiness of seeing that glori-

ous dethroned goddess reinstated in her rights, and also,' – and Mrs Perry's long mouth smiled – formidable like an alligator's, – 'for giving me the happiness of witnessing a union of mystic perfection;' whereupon, to Hamlin's horror, the tall and bony lady deposited a damp kiss on his forehead.

'Oh – but – thank you so much!' exclaimed Hamlin – 'I have not asked Miss Brown to marry me; I have only asked her to let me educate her. I wish her to choose whatever husband may deserve her.'

'And that will be yourself – your noble, darling self,' beamed Mrs Perry.

'I am happy that you approve of my decision,' said Hamlin, quickly; 'and since you do, will you kindly tell me the address of Miss Brown's – Miss Brown's guardian?'

'Julia, I forbid you,' moaned Perry feebly.

'His address' – answered Mrs Perry blandly, and taking no notice of her husband – 'is Richard Brown, care of Gillespie Brothers, New Cross. He is foreman at a cannon-foundry, or a place where they make torpedoes. I know it's something murderous and dreadful.'

'Richard Brown, Gillespie Brothers, New Cross,' wrote Hamlin in his notebook. 'Thank you so much; I shall write to him at once.'

'Oh, idiotic beast that I was!' groaned Perry, 'to think that it should all be my fault.'

'Come into my boudoir,' said Mrs Perry; 'you shall write to him without a moment's delay. Dearest Mr Hamlin, it is so noble, so lovely on your part; and dear Anne – how beautiful she will become!'

Perry paced up and down the room in violent despair, kicking at all the chairs and easels on his way, and hurling a tin of black paint against the ceiling, whence, having deposited its oozy contents, it slowly descended. After this, feeling that his despair was not yet vented, he stalked off to the German beer-cellar, in the Via Lambertesca,¹¹¹ and gloomily consumed a *bock*¹¹² – a proceeding to which he invariably resorted whenever his wife had inspired him with a more than usually strong wish to drown himself.

Suddenly an idea struck him, and he rushed to the nearest telegraph-office. There he spent upwards of an hour, and consumed many pieces of paper in concocting a missive which should, within the compass of twenty words, convey to Mr Richard Brown, care of Gillespie Brothers, New Cross, that the proposal being made to Anne Brown by a certain person must be immediately rejected, as its acceptance would bring ruin, dishonour, and misery on all parties. 'Proposal disastrous snare,' wound up Perry at last in triumph; and then discovered that, in his zeal for Hamlin's good, he had expressed disapprobation to the extent of exactly twenty francs of Italian money.

‘Nothing but pipes – loathsome, smelly, filthy pipes; never a cigar – for the next two months,’ meditated Perry, as he paid his money and received the clerk’s receipt; ‘but a fellow must save his friend after all.’

CHAPTER VII.

NO arrangements could be come to until Hamlin should hear from Anne Brown’s guardian, and this, even by return of post, was impossible under a week. And during that week, Hamlin determined to keep away from the Perrys’ house: the objurgations of Melton Perry, the congratulations of his wife, the very tittering of the children, all this vulgar prose had best be kept aloof from his romance; besides, he was in the ridiculous position that Anne was, and was not his; that she could no longer be considered the Perrys’ servant, and could not yet be considered as his ward. Accordingly, he betook himself for three days to Siena, deeming it impossible that any answer could come so soon.

But when Hamlin returned to his lodging in Florence, on the fourth day after his proposal to Anne Brown – it seemed to him as if he had proposed to her months ago, nay, as if he had never existed at all before that proposal – he was told that a gentleman had called that morning, and had left word that he would return again later on in the day.

‘Some confounded painter or poetaster of my acquaintance,’ thought Hamlin, annoyed that any one should call upon him at this point of his adventure.

A little later a card was brought in to him. The name upon it made him start – a large shopman’s card, on which was printed, ‘Richard Brown, New Cross,’

‘Ask him to come in,’ cried Hamlin.

The visitor stalked in: a tall, burly man, with bushy black hair and beard.¹¹³

‘An insolent cad,’ said Hamlin to himself.

‘Mr Walter Hamlin?’ asked the newcomer, bowing very slightly, and looking down upon Hamlin from his big, bent shoulders. ‘Precisely – and yon, I believe, are Miss Anne Brown’s cousin?’ answered Hamlin, stiffening at the other’s free-and-easy manner. The very look of this man rubbed him the wrong way. ‘Pray, sit down,’ he added, doing his best to be courteous. But the other had already sat down.

‘I have come here,’ said Richard Brown, in a deep, Scotch voice, which made a certain abruptness of manner even more offensive to his host, ‘in consequence of a telegram which I received from your friend Mr Melton Perry.’

Hamlin turned pale with anger.

‘Perry telegraphed behind my back,’ he exclaimed – ‘however, I had written you the same day. I presume you know the contents of my letter?’

‘I have received no letter from you – I suppose I started before it arrived,’ answered Richard Brown. ‘Mr Perry mentioned no letter from you in his tele-

gram, and as I understood from it that there were plans afoot which concerned my cousin and ward, I thought I had best come at once and inquire into them.'

He stopped a moment, and looked Hamlin in the face, as if to find out what sort of man he might be. He himself might be any age between thirty and forty, of the darkest possible Scotch type, sun-burnt like a bargee,¹¹⁴ snub of feature, with a huge, overhanging forehead; he was a man such as Hamlin had never dealt with – a type which he recognised as having seen among workmen and Dissenting preachers:¹¹⁵ ugly, intellectual, contemptuous – the incarnation of what, to the descendants of Cavaliers and Jamaica planters,¹¹⁶ seemed the aggressive lower classes.

'I see,' said Hamlin, coldly. 'I am greatly obliged to you for the trouble you have taken. Your presence here will make it much easier for us to settle all necessary matters.'

'Mr Perry,' went on the visitor, 'has given me rather a confused account of the proposal which I understand you to have made to my cousin; and I thought it wiser to see you before speaking to her. I must therefore beg you to tell me whether Mr Perry's account of your proposal is correct, and also whether you are in earnest in making it.'

'Had you waited for my letter, I think you could have had no further doubts,' answered Hamlin, with some irritation. 'To recapitulate, then. I proposed to Miss Brown that she should permit me to take charge of her education for the next two years, and, on her becoming of age and deeming her studies complete, to place at her disposal the capital of an income which should enable her to live in a manner corresponding with the education she had received, and to make a suitable marriage.'

While Hamlin was speaking a sneer came over his listener's face.

'I am to understand, therefore,' he said, 'that I was misinformed as to this being a proposal of marriage.'

'Pardon me,' corrected Hamlin, gently. 'I told your cousin that I hoped that perhaps, at the end of those two years, or more, she might feel inclined to accept me as her husband; but that my particular object was that Miss Brown should, on coming of age, find herself in possession of a fortune corresponding to her education, and which should leave her free to contract whatever marriage she pleased, or to continue single.'

Richard Brown flushed.

'In short,' he said, with a strange irony in his voice, 'you offer to provide my cousin with a competence whereon to live, or get married, after she shall have remained for two years in your charge. I fully appreciate the intention of your proposal; and I therefore beg to refuse it.'

The blood rushed to Hamlin's head. That such an interpretation should be put upon his words had never entered his mind. It was as if a whip had whizzed

about his ears and cut into his face. His first impulse was to knock the other down. But the sense of his misunderstood superiority, superiority unintelligible to his visitor, restrained him.

'I quite understand your refusal, Mr Brown,' he answered, 'as a result of your interpretation of the case; and I suppose I have no right to ask you to see my proposal, except as you would mean it were you to make it yourself.'

Richard Brown turned pale; but he too mastered his feelings.

'If your intention is to marry my cousin, why not marry her at once?' he asked, with something in his look which expressed that he felt himself not to be outwitted by a vicious fool.

Hamlin hesitated. He felt that he could never make this man understand his dreams, his plans of turning Anne Brown into a realised ideal, of wooing and winning the creature of his own making.

'Because – because,' he hesitated.

'Because,' interrupted Richard Brown, 'a man in your position of life cannot marry a girl like my cousin before she has been turned into a lady; and because, even if this be granted, he cannot bind himself to marry her until he see whether schooling has succeeded in making a lady of her. I perfectly follow your reasons; but you also can follow mine when I say that my cousin cannot be subjected to the ups and downs of your appreciation.'

In this man there was a hatred of Hamlin, not merely as a fine gentleman, an idler, but as an æsthete; a hatred not merely of class, but of temperament.

'You misunderstand my motives,' answered Hamlin, losing patience. 'My reason for not marrying your cousin at once is, that I would not marry a woman who cannot possibly love me as yet; and my reason against a formal engagement between us is, that I cannot consent to bind Miss Brown to marry me when she has no opportunity as yet of choosing a man more to her taste. It seems to me,' added Hamlin, feeling the advantage on his side, 'that to take your cousin in marriage now, or to bind her to marry me in the future, would be buying her in exchange for the education and the money which she will receive from me. That education and that money are intended to secure her freedom, to secure her choice of a man whom she may love, not to make her into the chattel of a man whom she could only despise.'

Hamlin's tone and these sentiments, which seemed to belong to a world west of the sun and east of the moon, evidently impressed Anne's guardian. He remained silent for a moment, unable to realise Hamlin's state of mind, while no longer able to disbelieve in it. But the temptation to disbelieve in the sincerity of this handsome, effeminate, aesthetic aristocrat was too strong.

'All this is very noble and chivalric,' he said, 'and I doubt not quite natural in a poet like you, Mr Hamlin; but for us practical people, I fear it won't do. I am fully persuaded of the desirability of giving my cousin some further schooling,

and fully persuaded also of the undesirability of leaving her any longer in the care of Mr Perry. So I shall take her back to England with me.'

Hamlin turned pale with anger. It sickened him to see his plans dragged in the mire of this fellow's suspicions, and at the same time he felt unable ever to make him understand, utterly helpless in defending himself. Suddenly an idea struck him.

'I see,' said Hamlin, rising and leaning against the fireplace, while his guest remained coolly seated – 'I see that, in plain words, you suppose that I project settling some money upon your cousin, with a view of making her my mistress for two years – that is it, is it not, Mr Brown?'

The brutal frankness staggered Brown; it was impossible to make any more insinuations now. And he began to feel ashamed of those which he had already made. His own imagination, then, was less clean than the intentions of this womanish fine gentleman?

Perhaps for this very reason he answered calmly, but turning very red –

'Yes, sir; that is exactly the state of the case.'

Hamlin felt a sort of triumph at this humiliation of his visitor.

'In that case,' he said, 'I think I can devise a plan which shall satisfy you – which will relieve your apprehensiveness. I offer not merely to settle upon Miss Brown the capital of five hundred a-year, to be administered by you until her majority; but also to give you my word of honour to marry Miss Brown at any time that she may summon me to do so.'

Richard Brown was taken aback; all this romance, which he had believed to be but a vicious snare, was then real.

'I don't understand you,' he said. 'I don't understand what you want to do with my cousin.'

'It seems difficult to explain it to you, Mr Brown,' said Hamlin; 'still, I may repeat it. I wish Miss Brown to receive all the advantages of education and money which a woman gifted like her has a right to, and which will enable her to freely marry a man worthy of her – myself, or any other in the world. I will not hear of binding Miss Brown to me at present, either by marriage or by promise of marriage; she is to remain absolutely independent. But I offer once more to pledge myself to marry her whenever she may wish it.'

Brown did not answer for a moment.

'Are you ready to sign a document to that effect?' he asked.

'I will give Miss Brown my word,' answered Hamlin, contemptuously; 'and I will give you, Mr Brown, as many signed documents as may be equivalent thereto in your eyes.'

Brown felt the insult, but he knew he had drawn it upon himself. For a moment he hesitated; his aversion to Hamlin and Hamlin's plan fighting painfully with his sense of the worldly interests of his ward. At last he said –

'On these conditions I can no longer make any opposition; and it rests with my cousin to accept or refuse your offer. I can only warn her and you – and to do so is my duty, I think – that, in my opinion, such an arrangement is utterly undesirable for both parties, and that my strong advice is not to enter upon it.'

'I take your warning to heart,' answered Hamlin, contemptuously; 'but I cannot agree with it. May I beg you to meet me at the English Consulate to-morrow morning, to witness the document which you proposed I should draw out; the matter of her money settlement I shall leave in the hands of my lawyers. What hour will suit you? and may I have the pleasure of receiving you to breakfast with me and Mr Perry, who will doubtless be my witness?'

Richard Brown bowed.

'Thank you,' he said briefly; 'I think I should prefer breakfasting at my inn. With regard to the document, I shall be happy to meet you at the Consulate any time convenient to yourself. But,' and his face became as threatening as his voice was studiously courteous, 'we must first hear whether, on second thoughts, my cousin accepts your proposal. Good afternoon, Mr Hamlin.'

'Good afternoon,' answered Hamlin.

Richard Brown's visit had left a nauseous taste in his soul.

CHAPTER VIII.

LATER in the afternoon Richard Brown called at the Perrys' and asked to see his cousin. He was received with effusiveness by Mrs Perry.

'So you have seen our noble, darling Hamlin,' she cried; 'and you have felt your heart go out to meet him as we have felt ours.'

'I have seen Mr Hamlin,' answered Brown roughly, not at all appreciating the lady's winning manners; 'and I should like to speak to my cousin, please.'

'Anne – my beautiful Anne' – cried Mrs Perry, opening the door of the next room.

'Poor child!' she added, 'how she has been trembling in her heart all day!'

Anne entered. She was paler even than usual, and was more than usually self-possessed. She had seen her guardian for a minute early that morning, and she knew that this visit would seal her fate.

'Good afternoon, Richard,' she said briefly.

Brown looked round at Mrs Perry, waiting for her to withdraw. But such was by no means her intention.

'Don't be unhappy, darling,' she said to Anne; 'I know how one woman always longs for another woman in these moments. I will stay with you while your cousin tells you the result of his visit.'

'It is very kind of you, madam,' said Brown gruffly, 'but I think this matter had better be settled solely between my cousin and myself. Would you permit her to take me into some other room?'

'Oh, I don't wish to intrude,' sighed Mrs Perry, 'I only wished to support this poor child with my presence. But after all, a woman who loves requires support from no one.' Saying which she swept out of the room.

There was a moment's silence.

'I have been to Mr Hamlin's, Anne,' said Brown briefly, seating himself by the fire.

'Well?'

The tone of voice was so resolute and even triumphant that he raised his head and looked up at her where she was standing by the table, a piece of needlework still in her hands.

'Well,' answered Brown quietly, and watching the effect of each of his words on the pale, melancholy, but dispassionate face of the girl, 'I have spoken to Mr Hamlin; and I find that you were correct in your judgment, and that I was mistaken in mine. He is in earnest in his proposal, and honest in it.'

'I knew that;' and Anne Brown wondered whether this could be the same cousin Dick who was a big boy, almost a man, when she was a tiny mite at Spezia; who took care of her when her mother was ill and her father was drunk; who used to shoulder his uncle and drag him off to bed when, in a fit of intoxication, he would come in and threaten to throw the babies out of the window. She recognised the small features, the dark skin and hair, the heavy intellectual brow; but he seemed to have changed in expression, to have grown hard, and arrogant, and coarse.

'I knew that,' she repeated, 'though you would not believe it. So,' she added, with a certain hardness in her manner, 'I suppose I am left free to decide, and that you are ready to let Mr Hamlin do what he chooses.'

'You are free to decide,' he answered. 'Mr Hamlin, as I have said, is serious and honest, and willing to make every provision which can bind him and leave you free, legally. I cannot, as your guardian, say no. But,' and his voice assumed a threatening tone, 'as your kinsman, and as the representative of your father, I most earnestly dissuade you from accepting this proposal.'

Anne reddened. 'But you can no longer oppose it,' she said quickly.

'I have told you before that you are free, Anne. And because you are free,' continued Brown, a sort of despair coming over him at the sight of the girl's indifference – 'because you are free, I want you to listen to me. This proposal is one which, in the eyes of the world, will change your life for the better: you will be educated, get the manners of a lady, be rich yourself, and marry a rich man. But will you stand higher in your own opinion? Would you stand as high

as you should in that of your father, if he were alive? You, having bartered your freedom, having accepted all from this one man?’

Anne did not answer.

‘Of course,’ went on Richard Brown eagerly, ‘you will have every worldly advantage. But will you be happy taken out of your own sphere of life, knowing yourself to be bound in gratitude to this man, who will always continue to feel your superior, to look down upon you as a beggar whom he has fed, or a chattel which he has bought? This man is, for his class and ideas, honourable: he wishes to leave you free to marry him only if you please; he wishes to marry you really and truly. But in reality he is making you his slave; for how can you refuse him the only thing which you, my poor Nan, can give him in return for his money? And in reality he is making you his mistress; for what sort of marriage is it which is a marriage merely before the world – where the one buys and the other is bought?’

Anne flushed still deeper, and trembled from head to foot as she leaned against the table. A dull pain clawed her at the heart, a lump rose up to her throat. But she did not speak.

Richard Brown misunderstood her silence. He rose and approached the table, and tried to put his arm paternally on her shoulder. She shrank back, but let his heavy hand rest on her shoulder. What did his touch matter when there were his words?

‘Annie, dear,’ said Brown more gently, ‘you know I am a rough man, and don’t know how to mince matters and say things to women; but you know that I am fond of you. Don’t you recollect when you were a wee lassie, and I used to carry you about on my back, and go into the water to get you the sea-weeds and the little nautiluses. I suppose you don’t any longer. But still, you know I would not for the world hurt my poor little Nan.’

Anne held on to the table, and as she recognised that familiar intonation, hot tears rolled down her cheeks. Her whole childhood seemed to return to her.

‘Don’t cry – don’t cry!’ exclaimed Brown, taking her hand. ‘Poor child! I know it must be very hard for you who are so young; I know what it must be to be tempted with a lady’s education, and money, and a fine gentleman, who’s in love with one, for a husband. But remember what your poor dad used to tell us, that we common folk must make our own way – make the others feel that we’re as good as they, and not accept anything from them. D’you remember how he used to say to me, ‘Work and be proud’? Well, and I have worked and have been proud, and it’s that that has enabled me to rest a little. And you, too, must be proud, and work, my little Annie.’

‘Look here,’ he went on, ‘you must not think you are never to be anything but a servant. I feel I’ve been to blame, and neglected you too long. You see, I’ve had to work hard for my life, out in England; but now I am quite safely off – indeed

much better off than I ever anticipated: my employer is going to take me into partnership next year. Well, since you wish to go to school, I will send you there. You shall come back with me to England, and I will send you to the very best school to be found: you shall be as good as any lady, and you shall owe nothing to any one. Annie, do say yes.'

He spoke, this rough man, almost as one might to a sick child; and as he spoke, he tried to pass his arm round the girl's waist. But Anne shuddered, and freed herself from his grasp. There was something in this big dark man, with his bushy hair and beard, which made her shrink physically, although she felt no suspicion of him morally. The thought of Hamlin passed across her mind – Hamlin, who was everything which Richard Brown was not.

'You are very good, Dick,' she said, feeling ashamed of her ingratitude; 'but – but – oh no, no, I can't, I can't!' and she hid her tears with her hands.

'Can't what?' exclaimed Brown, and his voice and face changed; 'can't what? Can't accept my offer; can't owe anything to me, to your cousin, to the man to whom your father confided you? No! you won't be under such an obligation, eh? Nay, don't humbug me. You can't give up the money, the land, the house, the fine name – all the things which he can give you and I can't; for I can only give you an education, and I was such a fool as to think that you wanted that!' and Brown laughed a loud, bitter laugh.

'You want to marry that man,' he went on brutally; 'well, do so. But remember what marriage means. You are a girl of the people, who has had to take care of herself – not a fine young lady, as yet, thank God, with all the fine names which fine folk have for nasty things. You know what marriage means. It means being a man's chattel, more than his beast of burden, his plaything, the toy of his caprice and sensuality. It means, also, that you must smother all love for a worthier man, or degrade yourself in your own eyes. Will you be this, sell yourself thus –?'

'Mr Hamlin does not wish me to degrade myself,' cried the girl. 'He respects me, – yes, he does; and you – you don't!'

'He respects you!' sneered Brown. 'And he does not want to degrade you. Of course, he's a respectable, highly moral man. But, upon my soul, I would rather you had been seduced by a man you loved, than that you should have sold yourself coldly in this way.'

Anne felt herself choking. For a moment she could not utter a word. Then suddenly, with a strange look in her eyes, she cried, in a tone which smote her cousin on the mouth –

'I love him!'

Brown turned and looked her in the face. She was very flushed, and her slate-grey eyes gleamed feverishly. But her face was calm, and she returned his taunting gaze, which sought for the proof that she lied, with a look of irrepressible contempt.

'I love him!' she repeated.

Brown took his hat.

'Good-bye,' he said, stretching out his hand; 'I left the choice in your hands, and you have chosen. To-morrow morning I shall settle everything with Mr Hamlin – the papers, I mean – which shall make him henceforth your sole protector. Then I shall go. Goodbye. I wish you joy of your choice' – he paused – 'you mercenary thing!'

Anne did not move.

Richard Brown had already turned the handle of the door when he stopped. 'One thing more,' he said, 'which I desire you to know. You have taken care of yourself hitherto, and you are prudent enough in all conscience, and world-wise enough, and heartless enough, to do so in future; so this piece of information may be of use to you. To-morrow he will sign a paper, which I shall keep till you come of age, declaring that, although he leaves you complete freedom in the choice of a husband, he binds himself to marry you whenever you may call upon him to do so. You will doubtless know how to turn this to profit. Good-bye.'

Anne sank into a chair, excited, exhausted, all her blood in movement, she scarcely knew why – insulted, maligned, and yet with a great sense of joyfulness in her heart.

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- tunately, after encountering financial difficulties, he left her and her five children to live with a French seamstress.
69. *Astolfo*: probably the character in the play *La vida es sueño* (1635) by Spanish playwright Pedro Calderón de la Barca (1600–81). In the play, Astolfo promises marriage to Rosaura but abandons her, and then proposes to Estrella, whom he later gives up for Rosaura.
 70. *the beautiful Fair-haired One*: probably referring to Rosamund Clifford (fl. c. 1160), the mistress of Henry II of England and the subject of the poem ‘The Complaint of Fair Rosamond’ (1592) by English poet Samuel Daniel (c. 1562–1619).
 71. *Asti spumante*: sparkling white wine from south of the town of Asti in north-west Italy.
 72. *‘Murray’*: John Murray and Sons, a London publishing house and producer of travel guides (known as ‘Murray’s Handbooks’) for British middle-class travellers in the nineteenth century.
 73. *Church of St Michael*: a church in central Lucca that was built in the twelfth century. On top of the church is a statue of St Michael.
 74. *Giunti*: an Italian family that was active in printing and publishing in Florence during the Italian Renaissance.
 75. *Teatro del Giglio*: a theatre in Lucca founded in 1675. In 1817, it was named after the flower (giglio) on the Bourbon family’s coat of arms.
 76. *Semiramide*: the last opera of Gioachino Rossini (1792–1868). It was based on the play *Sémiramis* (1748) by Voltaire (1694–1778), which in turn was based on the legend of the Assyrian queen Semiramis. In Rossini’s opera, Semiramide murders her husband, King Nino, with the help of Assur. Her son Arsace escapes and grows up to be a commander, and Semiramide, who does not recognize that he is her son, falls in love with him when he returns to Babylon. Oroë, a high priest, tells Arsace of his father’s murder. In his father’s tomb, he kills Semiramide when he tries to strike Assur.
 77. *Rossini’s music*: the music of Gioachino Rossini (1792–1868), a composer from Pesaro, Italy, known for his operas (the most famous being the 1816 *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*), chamber music and church music.
 78. *Tam o’Shanters*: men’s hats or bonnets of Scottish origin, made of wool with a pompom at the centre.
 79. *Baal’s statue*: a statue of Baal, an ancient fertility god worshipped by the Canaanites.
 80. *Prince Arsaces*: see note 76 above.
 81. *Nineveh*: the oldest city in ancient Assyria, located on the eastern bank of the Tigris. The precise location of the hanging gardens, which is one of the ancient Seven Wonders of the World, is still being debated.
 82. *roulades*: music, when several notes are sung to each syllable.
 83. *Tietiens and Trebelli*: Thérèse Tietiens (1831–77) and Zélia Trebelli (1834–92), who were opera stars. They teamed up for numerous performances of Rossini’s *Semiramide*, with Tietiens as Semiramide and Trebelli as Arsace.
 84. *Hammersmith*: an area in west London.
 85. *Siena*: a city in Tuscany and the capital city of the Italian province of Siena.
 86. *Perugia*: a city in the region of Umbria and the capital city of the central Italian province of Perugia.
 87. *Umbrian*: of the region of Umbria in central Italy.
 88. *Abruzzo and the Adriatic*: Abruzzo is a region in central Italy which on its eastern side touches the Adriatic Sea.
 89. *Sufi*: of Sufism, a mystical branch of Islam.
 90. *Civita Vecchia*: or Civitavecchia, a town on the west coast of central Italy.

91. *'Lost Loveliness' ... 'Stillborn Joy'*: titles which bring to mind those in Rossetti's *House of Life* sonnet sequence, such as 'Lost Days' and 'Stillborn Love'.
92. *Quixotic*: idealistic and impractical.
93. *Galatea ... to live and to love*: This passage refers to a Greek mythological story in which a sculptor named Pygmalion falls in love with a statue (later named Galatea) he has carved. He prays to Aphrodite, who, taking pity on him, gives the statue life.
94. *Sir Galahad*: in Arthurian legend, Galahad is one of the knights of King Arthur's Round Table. The purest of Arthur's knights, he obtains the Holy Grail.
95. *Palma Vecchio*: Palma Vecchio (1480–1528), Italian painter of the Venetian School. Influenced by works of Giorgione and Titian, he is best known for his half-length 'portraits' of court women.
96. *Venus Victrix*: the name is derived from Rossetti's sonnet of the same title (composed in 1871), found in his *Ballads and Sonnets* (1881).
97. *naked goddess ... apple of Paris*: referring to the Greek mythological story of the Judgment of Paris, in which a golden apple inscribed with the words 'for the fairest one' is claimed by three goddesses: Hera, Athena and Aphrodite (Venus). A Phrygian man named Paris is appointed by Zeus to choose the fairest of the three. Paris chooses Aphrodite, who offers him the love of Helen, the most beautiful woman alive.
98. *goddess of Love*: Venus (Roman) or Aphrodite (Greek).
99. *Landor*: Walter Savage Landor (1775–1864), a prolific English writer known for his sensitive poetry and colourful life filled with numerous libels.
100. *Malibran*: Maria Malibran (1808–36), a legendary Spanish opera singer who became famous for her tempestuous personality and remarkable vocal range.
101. *loggias*: Italian (plural) for *loggia*: an open-air gallery that is covered and is often used as a corridor between buildings.
102. *"Lady Audley's Secret": Lady Audley's Secret* (1862), a sensation novel written by Mary Elizabeth Braddon (1837–1915), about a woman named Lucy Graham who takes on another identity to escape her past.
103. *"Heir of Redclyffe": Heir of Redclyffe* (1853), a novel written by Charlotte M. Yonge (1823–1901), about a man named Guy Morville who struggles against a number of misfortunes caused by his cousin, Philip Morville. Guy's Christian fortitude helps him cope with the situation and ends up inspiring Philip to change his ways.
104. *Viareggio*: a city in the province of Lucca in Italy.
105. *Khan of Tartary*: the ruler of the lands of north and central Asia (present-day Russia and Mongolia).
106. *Sir Bors*: in Arthurian legend, Bors is the cousin of Sir Lancelot and one of three knights (the others being Percival and Galahad) that went on the Quest for the Holy Grail. He was the only knight to survive the Quest and return to court.
107. *Sir Percival*: in Arthurian legend, Percival is the second-most holy knight of King Arthur's Round Table, behind Galahad. He accompanied Bors and Galahad on the Quest for the Grail.
108. *Uffizi*: the Palazzo degli Uffizi in Florence.
109. *the 'Illustrated' ... the 'Graphic'*: The *Illustrated London News* was a weekly periodical founded in 1842 and the *Graphic* was a weekly periodical founded in 1869. Both periodicals used copious amount of pictures to accompany their domestic and international news stories.
110. *before you have time to say Jack Robinson*: a variation of the expression 'before you can say Jack Robinson', which means 'almost immediately'. The expression dates from the eighteenth century. The identity of Jack Robinson is unknown.

111. *Via Lambertesca*: a street in Florence.
112. bock: a strong beer that was first brewed in the German town of Einbeck ('bock' comes from 'beck') in the Middle Ages.
113. *tall, burly man, with bushy black hair and beard*: the first passage of many in the novel which suggest that Richard Brown has, to some extent, been modelled on William Morris. In this case, the colour of the hair is different.
114. *bargee*: a person who operates a barge, a flat-bottomed boat used for transporting goods.
115. *Dissenting preachers*: preachers linked to groups that have separated from the established Church.
116. *Cavaliers and Jamaica planters*: During the colonial period, the Cavaliers, or supporters of Charles I, moved in large numbers to the royal colony of Virginia in America to build their fortunes. Likewise, British merchants and members of the British aristocracy went to the island of Jamaica in the Caribbean to become plantation owners for the same reason.
117. *Boboli Gardens*: a park in Florence dating from the mid-sixteenth century, known for its sculptures and fountains. It was commissioned by Leonor Álvarez de Toledo (1522–62), the wife of Cosimo I de Medici (1519–74), and was designed by a series of architects, notably Niccolò Tribolo (1500–50), Bartolomeo Ammanati (1511–92) and Bernardo Buontalenti (1536–1608).
118. *bonne*: French: a maid who is charged with the responsibility of caring for a child.
119. *Rhine*: a significant river in Western Europe which starts in Switzerland and flows through Germany and the Netherlands and out into the North Sea.
120. *Ehrenbreitstein*: a fortress on a mountain on the east bank of the Rhine.
121. *Coblenz*: a town in west Germany that is situated along the Rhine and opposite the Ehrenbreitstein fortress.
122. *Venice*: a city in northern Italy that spans a number of islands.
123. *Munich*: a city in Bavaria, Germany.
124. *Mosel*: a river in Western Europe which starts in France and flows through Luxembourg and Germany. It joins the Rhine at Coblenz.
125. *the Athenaeum*: a London literary magazine which ran from 1828 to 1921 and which featured many works by famous writers.
126. *A rivederci*: Italian: good-bye for now.
127. *rappel*: French: reminder.
128. *Bach's 'Mein gläubiges Herz'*: the aria, whose translated title is 'My Faithful Heart', is from Cantata 68, *Also hat Gott die Welt geliebt* (1725), by German composer Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750).
129. *the 'Petrarch' he had given her at Lucca*: Francesco Petrarca (1304–74), an Italian poet and scholar whose poetry was greatly admired by his contemporaries. He invented what is now called the Petrarchan (or Italian) sonnet. In 1327, when he was in a church in Avignon, he saw a woman named Laura, and this experience became the focus of his most famous work, *Il Canzoniere* (c. 1327–c. 1367). Hamlin gave Anne a copy of Dante's *Vita Nuova*, not a copy of one of Petrarca's works.
130. *famous Rhenish oculist*: either Albrecht von Graefe (1828–70) or Carl Ferdinand von Arlt (1812–87).
131. *Girton*: the first residential college for women. It was founded by Emily Davies in Hitchin in 1869, and moved to its present site in Cambridge in 1873. It sought to give female students the same educational opportunities as male students who attended the University of Cambridge.