



# DANIEL DERONDA

GEORGE ELIOT

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# BOOK I.—THE SPOILED CHILD.

## CHAPTER I.

Men can do nothing without the make-believe of a beginning. Even science, the strict measurer, is obliged to start with a make-believe unit, and must fix on a point in the stars' unceasing journey when his sidereal clock shall pretend that time is at Nought. His less accurate grandmother Poetry has always been understood to start in the middle; but on reflection it appears that her proceeding is not very different from his; since Science, too, reckons backward as well as forward, divides his unit into billions, and with his clock-finger at Nought really sets off *in medias res*. No retrospect will take us to the true beginning; and whether our prologue be in heaven or on earth, it is but a fraction of that all-presupposing fact with which our story sets out.

Was she beautiful or not beautiful? and what was the secret of form or expression which gave the dynamic quality to her glance? Was the good or the evil genius dominant in those beams? Probably the evil; else why was the effect that of unrest rather than of undisturbed charm? Why was the wish to look again felt as coercion and not as a longing in which the whole being consents?

She who raised these questions in Daniel Deronda's mind was occupied in gambling: not in the open air under a southern sky, tossing coppers on a ruined wall, with rags about her limbs; but in one of those splendid resorts which the enlightenment of ages has prepared for the same species of pleasure at a heavy cost of gilt mouldings, dark-toned color and chubby nudities, all correspondingly heavy—forming a suitable condenser for human breath belonging, in great part, to the highest fashion, and not

easily procurable to be breathed in elsewhere in the like proportion, at least by persons of little fashion.

It was near four o'clock on a September day, so that the atmosphere was well-brewed to a visible haze. There was deep stillness, broken only by a light rattle, a light chink, a small sweeping sound, and an occasional monotone in French, such as might be expected to issue from an ingeniously constructed automaton. Round two long tables were gathered two serried crowds of human beings, all save one having their faces and attention bent on the tables. The one exception was a melancholy little boy, with his knees and calves simply in their natural clothing of epidermis, but for the rest of his person in a fancy dress. He alone had his face turned toward the doorway, and fixing on it the blank gaze of a bedizened child stationed as a masquerading advertisement on the platform of an itinerant show, stood close behind a lady deeply engaged at the roulette-table.

About this table fifty or sixty persons were assembled, many in the outer rows, where there was occasionally a deposit of new-comers, being mere spectators, only that one of them, usually a woman, might now and then be observed putting down a five-franc with a simpering air, just to see what the passion of gambling really was. Those who were taking their pleasure at a higher strength, and were absorbed in play, showed very distant varieties of European type: Livonian and Spanish, Graeco-Italian and miscellaneous German, English aristocratic and English plebeian. Here certainly was a striking admission of human equality. The white bejewelled fingers of an English countess were very near touching a bony, yellow, crab-like hand stretching a bared wrist to clutch a heap of coin—a hand easy to sort with the square, gaunt face, deep-set eyes, grizzled eyebrows, and ill-combed scanty hair which seemed a slight metamorphosis of the vulture. And where else would her ladyship have graciously consented to sit by that dry-lipped feminine figure prematurely old, withered



after short bloom like her artificial flowers, holding a shabby velvet reticule before her, and occasionally putting in her mouth the point with which she pricked her card? There too, very near the fair countess, was a respectable London tradesman, blonde and soft-handed, his sleek hair scrupulously parted behind and before, conscious of circulars addressed to the nobility and gentry, whose distinguished patronage enabled him to take his holidays fashionably, and to a certain extent in their distinguished company. Not his the gambler's passion that nullifies appetite, but a well-fed leisure, which, in the intervals of winning money in business and spending it showily, sees no better resource than winning money in play and spending it yet more showily—reflecting always that Providence had never manifested any disapprobation of his amusement, and dispassionate enough to leave off if the sweetness of winning much and seeing others lose had turned to the sourness of losing much and seeing others win. For the vice of gambling lay in losing money at it. In his bearing there might be something of the tradesman, but in his pleasures he was fit to rank with the owners of the oldest titles. Standing close to his chair was a handsome Italian, calm, statuesque, reaching across him to place the first pile of napoleons from a new bagful just brought him by an envoy with a scrolled mustache. The pile was in half a minute pushed over to an old bewigged woman with eye-glasses pinching her nose. There was a slight gleam, a faint mumbling smile about the lips of the old woman; but the statuesque Italian remained impassive, and—probably secure in an infallible system which placed his foot on the neck of chance—immediately prepared a new pile. So did a man with the air of an emaciated beau or worn-out libertine, who looked at life through one eye-glass, and held out his hand tremulously when he asked for change. It could surely be no severity of system, but rather some dream of white crows, or the induction that the eighth of

the month was lucky, which inspired the fierce yet tottering impulsiveness of his play.

But, while every single player differed markedly from every other, there was a certain uniform negativeness of expression which had the effect of a mask—as if they had all eaten of some root that for the time compelled the brains of each to the same narrow monotony of action.

Deronda's first thought when his eyes fell on this scene of dull, gas-poisoned absorption, was that the gambling of Spanish shepherd-boys had seemed to him more enviable:—so far Rousseau might be justified in maintaining that art and science had done a poor service to mankind. But suddenly he felt the moment become dramatic. His attention was arrested by a young lady who, standing at an angle not far from him, was the last to whom his eyes traveled. She was bending and speaking English to a middle-aged lady seated at play beside her: but the next instant she returned to her play, and showed the full height of a graceful figure, with a face which might possibly be looked at without admiration, but could hardly be passed with indifference.

The inward debate which she raised in Deronda gave to his eyes a growing expression of scrutiny, tending farther and farther away from the glow of mingled undefined sensibilities forming admiration. At one moment they followed the movements of the figure, of the arms and hands, as this problematic sylph bent forward to deposit her stake with an air of firm choice; and the next they returned to the face which, at present unaffected by beholders, was directed steadily toward the game. The sylph was a winner; and as her taper fingers, delicately gloved in pale-gray, were adjusting the coins which had been pushed toward her in order to pass them back again to the winning point, she looked round her with a survey too markedly cold and neutral not to have in it a little of that nature which we call art concealing an inward exultation.

But in the course of that survey her eyes met Deronda's, and instead of averting them as she would have desired to do, she was unpleasantly conscious that they were arrested—how long? The darting sense that he was measuring her and looking down on her as an inferior, that he was of different quality from the human dross around her, that he felt himself in a region outside and above her, and was examining her as a specimen of a lower order, roused a tingling resentment which stretched the moment with conflict. It did not bring the blood to her cheeks, but it sent it away from her lips. She controlled herself by the help of an inward defiance, and without other sign of emotion than this lip-paleness turned to her play. But Deronda's gaze seemed to have acted as an evil eye. Her stake was gone. No matter; she had been winning ever since she took to roulette with a few napoleons at command, and had a considerable reserve. She had begun to believe in her luck, others had begun to believe in it: she had visions of being followed by a *cortège* who would worship her as a goddess of luck and watch her play as a directing augury. Such things had been known of male gamblers; why should not a woman have a like supremacy? Her friend and chaperon who had not wished her to play at first was beginning to approve, only administering the prudent advice to stop at the right moment and carry money back to England—advice to which Gwendolen had replied that she cared for the excitement of play, not the winnings. On that supposition the present moment ought to have made the flood-tide in her eager experience of gambling. Yet, when her next stake was swept away, she felt the orbits of her eyes getting hot, and the certainty she had (without looking) of that man still watching her was something like a pressure which begins to be torturing. The more reason to her why she should not flinch, but go on playing as if she were indifferent to loss or gain. Her friend touched her elbow and proposed that they should quit the table. For reply Gwendolen put ten louis on the same spot: she was in

that mood of defiance in which the mind loses sight of any end beyond the satisfaction of enraged resistance; and with the puerile stupidity of a dominant impulse includes luck among its objects of defiance. Since she was not winning strikingly, the next best thing was to lose strikingly. She controlled her muscles, and showed no tremor of mouth or hands. Each time her stake was swept off she doubled it. Many were now watching her, but the sole observation she was conscious of was Deronda's, who, though she never looked toward him, she was sure had not moved away. Such a drama takes no long while to play out: development and catastrophe can often be measured by nothing clumsier than the moment-hand. "Faites votre jeu, mesdames et messieurs," said the automatic voice of destiny from between the mustache and imperial of the croupier: and Gwendolen's arm was stretched to deposit her last poor heap of napoleons. "Le jeu ne va plus," said destiny. And in five seconds Gwendolen turned from the table, but turned resolutely with her face toward Deronda and looked at him. There was a smile of irony in his eyes as their glances met; but it was at least better that he should have kept his attention fixed on her than that he disregarded her as one of an insect swarm who had no individual physiognomy. Besides, in spite of his superciliousness and irony, it was difficult to believe that he did not admire her spirit as well as her person: he was young, handsome, distinguished in appearance—not one of these ridiculous and dowdy Philistines who thought it incumbent on them to blight the gaming-table with a sour look of protest as they passed by it. The general conviction that we are admirable does not easily give way before a single negative; rather when any of Vanity's large family, male or female, find their performance received coldly, they are apt to believe that a little more of it will win over the unaccountable dissident. In Gwendolen's habits of mind it had been taken for granted that she knew what was admirable and that she herself was admired. This basis of her thinking had

received a disagreeable concussion, and reeled a little, but was not easily to be overthrown.

In the evening the same room was more stiflingly heated, was brilliant with gas and with the costumes of ladies who floated their trains along it or were seated on the ottomans.

The Nereid in sea-green robes and silver ornaments, with a pale sea-green feather fastened in silver falling backward over her green hat and light brown hair, was Gwendolen Harleth. She was under the wing, or rather soared by the shoulder, of the lady who had sat by her at the roulette-table; and with them was a gentleman with a white mustache and clipped hair: solid-browed, stiff and German. They were walking about or standing to chat with acquaintances, and Gwendolen was much observed by the seated groups.

"A striking girl—that Miss Harleth—unlike others."

"Yes, she has got herself up as a sort of serpent now—all green and silver, and winds her neck about a little more than usual."

"Oh, she must always be doing something extraordinary. She is that kind of girl, I fancy. Do you think her pretty, Mr. Vandernoodt?"

"Very. A man might risk hanging for her—I mean a fool might."

"You like a *nez retroussé*, then, and long narrow eyes?"

"When they go with such an *ensemble*."

"The *ensemble du serpent*?"

"If you will. Woman was tempted by a serpent; why not man?"

"She is certainly very graceful; but she wants a tinge of color in her cheeks. It is a sort of Lamia beauty she has."

"On the contrary, I think her complexion one of her chief charms. It is a warm paleness; it looks thoroughly healthy. And that delicate nose with its gradual little upward curve is distracting. And then her mouth—there never was a prettier mouth, the lips curled backward so finely, eh, Mackworth?"

"Think so? I cannot endure that sort of mouth. It looks so self-complacent, as if it knew its own beauty—the curves are too immovable. I like a mouth that trembles more."

"For my part, I think her odious," said a dowager. "It is wonderful what unpleasant girls get into vogue. Who are these Langens? Does anybody know them?"

"They are quite *comme il faut*. I have dined with them several times at the *Russie*. The baroness is English. Miss Harleth calls her cousin. The girl herself is thoroughly well-bred, and as clever as possible."

"Dear me! and the baron?"

"A very good furniture picture."

"Your baroness is always at the roulette-table," said Mackworth. "I fancy she has taught the girl to gamble."

"Oh, the old woman plays a very sober game; drops a ten-franc piece here and there. The girl is more headlong. But it is only a freak."

"I hear she has lost all her winnings to-day. Are they rich? Who knows?"

"Ah, who knows? Who knows that about anybody?" said Mr. Vandernoodt, moving off to join the Langens.

The remark that Gwendolen wound her neck about more than usual this evening was true. But it was not that she might carry out the serpent idea more completely: it was that she watched for any chance of seeing Deronda, so that she might inquire about this stranger, under whose measuring gaze she was still wincing. At last her opportunity came.

"Mr. Vandernoodt, you know everybody," said Gwendolen, not too eagerly, rather with a certain languor of utterance which she sometimes gave to her clear soprano. "Who is that near the door?"

"There are half a dozen near the door. Do you mean that old Adonis in the George the Fourth wig?"

"No, no; the dark-haired young man on the right with the dreadful expression."

"Dreadful, do you call it? I think he is an uncommonly fine fellow."

"But who is he?"

"He is lately come to our hotel with Sir Hugo Mallinger."

"Sir Hugo Mallinger?"

"Yes. Do you know him?"

"No." (Gwendolen colored slightly.) "He has a place near us, but he never comes to it. What did you say was the name of that gentleman near the door?"

"Deronda—Mr. Deronda."

"What a delightful name! Is he an Englishman?"

"Yes. He is reported to be rather closely related to the baronet. You are interested in him?"

"Yes. I think he is not like young men in general."

"And you don't admire young men in general?"

"Not in the least. I always know what they will say. I can't at all guess what this Mr. Deronda would say. What *does* he say?"

"Nothing, chiefly. I sat with his party for a good hour last night on the terrace, and he never spoke—and was not smoking either. He looked bored."

"Another reason why I should like to know him. I am always bored."

"I should think he would be charmed to have an introduction. Shall I bring it about? Will you allow it, baroness?"

"Why not?—since he is related to Sir Hugo Mallinger. It is a new *rôle* of yours, Gwendolen, to be always bored," continued Madame von Langen, when Mr. Vandernoodt had moved away. "Until now you have always seemed eager about something from morning till night."

"That is just because I am bored to death. If I am to leave off play I must break my arm or my collar-bone. I must make something happen; unless you will go into Switzerland and take me up the Matterhorn."

"Perhaps this Mr. Deronda's acquaintance will do instead of the Matterhorn."

"Perhaps."

But Gwendolen did not make Deronda's acquaintance on this occasion. Mr. Vandernoodt did not succeed in bringing him up to her that evening, and when she re-entered her own room she found a letter recalling her home.

## CHAPTER II.

This man contrives a secret 'twixt us two,  
That he may quell me with his meeting eyes  
Like one who quells a lioness at bay.

This was the letter Gwendolen found on her table:—

DEAREST CHILD.—I have been expecting to hear from you for a week. In your last you said the Langens thought of leaving Leubronn and going to Baden. How could you be so thoughtless as to leave me in uncertainty about your address? I am in the greatest anxiety lest this should not reach you. In any case, you were to come home at the end of September, and I must now entreat you to return as quickly as possible, for if you spent all your money it would be out of my power to send you any more, and you must not borrow of the Langens, for I could not repay them. This is the sad truth, my child—I wish I could prepare you for it better—but a dreadful calamity has befallen us all. You know nothing about business and will not understand it; but Grapnell & Co. have failed for a million, and we are totally ruined—your aunt Gascoigne as well as I, only that your uncle has his benefice, so that by putting down their carriage and getting interest for the boys, the family can go on. All the property our poor father saved for us goes to pay the liabilities. There is nothing I can call my own. It is better you should know this at once, though it rends my heart to have to tell it you. Of course we cannot help thinking what a pity it was that you went away just when you did. But I shall never reproach you, my dear child; I would save you from all trouble if I could. On your way



home you will have time to prepare yourself for the change you will find. We shall perhaps leave Offendene at once, for we hope that Mr. Haynes, who wanted it before, may be ready to take it off my hands. Of course we cannot go to the rectory—there is not a corner there to spare. We must get some hut or other to shelter us, and we must live on your uncle Gascoigne's charity, until I see what else can be done. I shall not be able to pay the debts to the tradesmen besides the servants' wages. Summon up your fortitude, my dear child; we must resign ourselves to God's will. But it is hard to resign one's self to Mr. Lassman's wicked recklessness, which they say was the cause of the failure. Your poor sisters can only cry with me and give me no help. If you were once here, there might be a break in the cloud—I always feel it impossible that you can have been meant for poverty. If the Langens wish to remain abroad, perhaps you can put yourself under some one else's care for the journey. But come as soon as you can to your afflicted and loving mamma,

FANNY DAVILOW.

The first effect of this letter on Gwendolen was half-stupefying. The implicit confidence that her destiny must be one of luxurious ease, where any trouble that occurred would be well clad and provided for, had been stronger in her own mind than in her mamma's, being fed there by her youthful blood and that sense of superior claims which made a large part of her consciousness. It was almost as difficult for her to believe suddenly that her position had become one of poverty and of humiliating dependence, as it would have been to get into the strong current of her blooming life the chill sense that her death would really come. She stood motionless for a few minutes, then tossed off her hat and automatically looked in the glass. The coils of her smooth light-brown hair were still in order perfect enough for a ball-room; and as on other nights, Gwendolen might have looked lingeringly at herself for pleasure (surely an allowable indulgence); but now she took no

conscious note of her reflected beauty, and simply stared right before her as if she had been jarred by a hateful sound and was waiting for any sign of its cause. By-and-by she threw herself in the corner of the red velvet sofa, took up the letter again and read it twice deliberately, letting it at last fall on the ground, while she rested her clasped hands on her lap and sat perfectly still, shedding no tears. Her impulse was to survey and resist the situation rather than to wail over it. There was no inward exclamation of "Poor mamma!" Her mamma had never seemed to get much enjoyment out of life, and if Gwendolen had been at this moment disposed to feel pity she would have bestowed it on herself—for was she not naturally and rightfully the chief object of her mamma's anxiety too? But it was anger, it was resistance that possessed her; it was bitter vexation that she had lost her gains at roulette, whereas if her luck had continued through this one day she would have had a handsome sum to carry home, or she might have gone on playing and won enough to support them all. Even now was it not possible? She had only four napoleons left in her purse, but she possessed some ornaments which she could sell: a practice so common in stylish society at German baths that there was no need to be ashamed of it; and even if she had not received her mamma's letter, she would probably have decided to get money for an Etruscan necklace which she happened not to have been wearing since her arrival; nay, she might have done so with an agreeable sense that she was living with some intensity and escaping humdrum. With ten louis at her disposal and a return of her former luck, which seemed probable, what could she do better than go on playing for a few days? If her friends at home disapproved of the way in which she got the money, as they certainly would, still the money would be there. Gwendolen's imagination dwelt on this course and created agreeable consequences, but not with unbroken confidence and rising certainty as it would have done if she had been touched with the gambler's mania.

She had gone to the roulette-table not because of passion, but in search of it: her mind was still sanely capable of picturing balanced probabilities, and while the chance of winning allured her, the chance of losing thrust itself on her with alternate strength and made a vision from which her pride sank sensitively. For she was resolved not to tell the Langens that any misfortune had befallen her family, or to make herself in any way indebted to their compassion; and if she were to part with her jewelry to any observable extent, they would interfere by inquiries and remonstrances. The course that held the least risk of intolerable annoyance was to raise money on her necklace early in the morning, tell the Langens that her mother desired her immediate return without giving a reason, and take the train for Brussels that evening. She had no maid with her, and the Langens might make difficulties about her returning home, but her will was peremptory.

Instead of going to bed she made as brilliant a light as she could and began to pack, working diligently, though all the while visited by the scenes that might take place on the coming day—now by the tiresome explanations and farewells, and the whirling journey toward a changed home, now by the alternative of staying just another day and standing again at the roulette-table. But always in this latter scene there was the presence of that Deronda, watching her with exasperating irony, and—the two keen experiences were inevitably revived together—beholding her again forsaken by luck. This importunate image certainly helped to sway her resolve on the side of immediate departure, and to urge her packing to the point which would make a change of mind inconvenient. It had struck twelve when she came into her room, and by the time she was assuring herself that she had left out only what was necessary, the faint dawn was stealing through the white blinds and dulling her candles. What was the use of going to bed? Her cold bath was refreshment enough, and she saw that a slight trace of fatigue about the eyes

only made her look the more interesting. Before six o'clock she was completely equipped in her gray traveling dress even to her felt hat, for she meant to walk out as soon as she could count on seeing other ladies on their way to the springs. And happening to be seated sideways before the long strip of mirror between her two windows she turned to look at herself, leaning her elbow on the back of the chair in an attitude that might have been chosen for her portrait. It is possible to have a strong self-love without any self-satisfaction, rather with a self-discontent which is the more intense because one's own little core of egoistic sensibility is a supreme care; but Gwendolen knew nothing of such inward strife. She had a *naïve* delight in her fortunate self, which any but the harshest saintliness will have some indulgence for in a girl who had every day seen a pleasant reflection of that self in her friends' flattery as well as in the looking-glass. And even in this beginning of troubles, while for lack of anything else to do she sat gazing at her image in the growing light, her face gathered a complacency gradual as the cheerfulness of the morning. Her beautiful lips curled into a more and more decided smile, till at last she took off her hat, leaned forward and kissed the cold glass which had looked so warm. How could she believe in sorrow? If it attacked her, she felt the force to crush it, to defy it, or run away from it, as she had done already. Anything seemed more possible than that she could go on bearing miseries, great or small.

Madame von Langen never went out before breakfast, so that Gwendolen could safely end her early walk by taking her way homeward through the Obere Strasse in which was the needed shop, sure to be open after seven. At that hour any observers whom she minded would be either on their walks in the region of the springs, or would be still in their bedrooms; but certainly there was one grand hotel, the *Czarina* from which eyes might follow her up to Mr. Wiener's door. This was a chance to be risked: might she not be going in to buy something which had struck her

fancy? This implicit falsehood passed through her mind as she remembered that the *Czarina* was Deronda's hotel; but she was then already far up the Obere Strasse, and she walked on with her usual floating movement, every line in her figure and drapery falling in gentle curves attractive to all eyes except those which discerned in them too close a resemblance to the serpent, and objected to the revival of serpent-worship. She looked neither to the right hand nor to the left, and transacted her business in the shop with a coolness which gave little Mr. Weiner nothing to remark except her proud grace of manner, and the superior size and quality of the three central turquoises in the necklace she offered him. They had belonged to a chain once her father's: but she had never known her father; and the necklace was in all respects the ornament she could most conveniently part with. Who supposes that it is an impossible contradiction to be superstitious and rationalizing at the same time? Roulette encourages a romantic superstition as to the chances of the game, and the most prosaic rationalism as to human sentiments which stand in the way of raising needful money. Gwendolen's dominant regret was that after all she had only nine louis to add to the four in her purse: these Jew dealers were so unscrupulous in taking advantage of Christians unfortunate at play! But she was the Langens' guest in their hired apartment, and had nothing to pay there: thirteen louis would do more than take her home; even if she determined on risking three, the remaining ten would more than suffice, since she meant to travel right on, day and night. As she turned homeward, nay, entered and seated herself in the *salon* to await her friends and breakfast, she still wavered as to her immediate departure, or rather she had concluded to tell the Langens simply that she had had a letter from her mamma desiring her return, and to leave it still undecided when she should start. It was already the usual breakfast-time, and hearing some one enter as she was leaning back rather tired and hungry with her eyes

shut, she rose expecting to see one or other of the Langens—the words which might determine her lingering at least another day, ready-formed to pass her lips. But it was the servant bringing in a small packet for Miss Harleth, which had at that moment been left at the door. Gwendolen took it in her hand and immediately hurried into her own room. She looked paler and more agitated than when she had first read her mamma's letter. Something—she never quite knew what—revealed to her before she opened the packet that it contained the necklace she had just parted with. Underneath the paper it was wrapped in a cambric handkerchief, and within this was a scrap of torn-off note-paper, on which was written with a pencil, in clear but rapid handwriting—"A stranger who has found Miss Harleth's necklace returns it to her with the hope that she will not again risk the loss of it."

Gwendolen reddened with the vexation of wounded pride. A large corner of the handkerchief seemed to have been recklessly torn off to get rid of a mark; but she at once believed in the first image of "the stranger" that presented itself to her mind. It was Deronda; he must have seen her go into the shop; he must have gone in immediately after and repurchased the necklace. He had taken an unpardonable liberty, and had dared to place her in a thoroughly hateful position. What could she do?—Not, assuredly, act on her conviction that it was he who had sent her the necklace and straightway send it back to him: that would be to face the possibility that she had been mistaken; nay, even if the "stranger" were he and no other, it would be something too gross for her to let him know that she had divined this, and to meet him again with that recognition in their minds. He knew very well that he was entangling her in helpless humiliation: it was another way of smiling at her ironically, and taking the air of a supercilious mentor. Gwendolen felt the bitter tears of mortification rising and rolling down her cheeks. No one had ever before dared to treat her with irony and contempt. One thing was clear: she

must carry out her resolution to quit this place at once; it was impossible for her to reappear in the public *salon*, still less stand at the gaming-table with the risk of seeing Deronda. Now came an importunate knock at the door: breakfast was ready. Gwendolen with a passionate movement thrust necklace, cambric, scrap of paper, and all into her *nécessaire*, pressed her handkerchief against her face, and after pausing a minute or two to summon back her proud self-control, went to join her friends. Such signs of tears and fatigue as were left seemed accordant enough with the account she at once gave of her having sat up to do her packing, instead of waiting for help from her friend's maid. There was much protestation, as she had expected, against her traveling alone, but she persisted in refusing any arrangements for companionship. She would be put into the ladies' compartment and go right on. She could rest exceedingly well in the train, and was afraid of nothing.

In this way it happened that Gwendolen never reappeared at the roulette-table, but that Thursday evening left Leubronn for Brussels, and on Saturday morning arrived at Offendene, the home to which she and her family were soon to say a last good-bye.

### CHAPTER III.

"Let no flower of the spring pass by us; let us crown ourselves with rosebuds before they be withered."—BOOK OF WISDOM.

Pity that Offendene was not the home of Miss Harleth's childhood, or endeared to her by family memories! A human life, I think, should be well rooted in some spot of a native land, where it may get the love of tender kinship for the face of earth, for the labors men go forth to, for the sounds and accents that haunt it, for whatever will give that early home a familiar unmistakable difference amid the

future widening of knowledge: a spot where the definiteness of early memories may be inwrought with affection, and—kindly acquaintance with all neighbors, even to the dogs and donkeys, may spread not by sentimental effort and reflection, but as a sweet habit of the blood. At five years old, mortals are not prepared to be citizens of the world, to be stimulated by abstract nouns, to soar above preference into impartiality; and that prejudice in favor of milk with which we blindly begin, is a type of the way body and soul must get nourished at least for a time. The best introduction to astronomy is to think of the nightly heavens as a little lot of stars belonging to one's own homestead.

But this blessed persistence in which affection can take root had been wanting in Gwendolen's life. It was only a year before her recall from Leubronn that Offendene had been chosen as her mamma's home, simply for its nearness to Pennicote Rectory, and that Mrs. Davilow, Gwendolen, and her four half-sisters (the governess and the maid following in another vehicle) had been driven along the avenue for the first time, on a late October afternoon when the rooks were crawling loudly above them, and the yellow elm-leaves were whirling.

The season suited the aspect of the old oblong red-brick house, rather too anxiously ornamented with stone at every line, not excepting the double row of narrow windows and the large square portico. The stone encouraged a greenish lichen, the brick a powdery gray, so that though the building was rigidly rectangular there was no harshness in the physiognomy which it turned to the three avenues cut east, west and south in the hundred yards' breadth of old plantation encircling the immediate grounds. One would have liked the house to have been lifted on a knoll, so as to look beyond its own little domain to the long thatched roofs of the distant villages, the church towers, the scattered homesteads, the gradual rise of surging woods, and the green breadths of undulating park which made the



beautiful face of the earth in that part of Wessex. But though standing thus behind a screen amid flat pastures, it had on one side a glimpse of the wider world in the lofty curves of the chalk downs, grand steadfast forms played over by the changing days.

The house was but just large enough to be called a mansion, and was moderately rented, having no manor attached to it, and being rather difficult to let with its sombre furniture and faded upholstery. But inside and outside it was what no beholder could suppose to be inhabited by retired trades-people: a certainty which was worth many conveniences to tenants who not only had the taste that shrinks from new finery, but also were in that border-territory of rank where annexation is a burning topic: and to take up her abode in a house which had once sufficed for dowager countesses gave a perceptible tinge to Mrs. Davilow's satisfaction in having an establishment of her own. This, rather mysteriously to Gwendolen, appeared suddenly possible on the death of her step-father, Captain Davilow, who had for the last nine years joined his family only in a brief and fitful manner, enough to reconcile them to his long absences; but she cared much more for the fact than for the explanation. All her prospects had become more agreeable in consequence. She had disliked their former way of life, roving from one foreign watering-place or Parisian apartment to another, always feeling new antipathies to new suites of hired furniture, and meeting new people under conditions which made her appear of little importance; and the variation of having passed two years at a showy school, where, on all occasions of display, she had been put foremost, had only deepened her sense that so exceptional a person as herself could hardly remain in ordinary circumstances or in a social position less than advantageous. Any fear of this latter evil was banished now that her mamma was to have an establishment; for on the point of birth Gwendolen was quite easy. She had no notion how her maternal grandfather got the fortune inherited by

his two daughters; but he had been a West Indian—which seemed to exclude further question; and she knew that her father's family was so high as to take no notice of her mamma, who nevertheless preserved with much pride the miniature of a Lady Molly in that connection. She would probably have known much more about her father but for a little incident which happened when she was twelve years old. Mrs. Davilow had brought out, as she did only at wide intervals, various memorials of her first husband, and while showing his miniature to Gwendolen recalled with a fervor which seemed to count on a peculiar filial sympathy, the fact that dear papa had died when his little daughter was in long clothes. Gwendolen, immediately thinking of the unlovable step-father whom she had been acquainted with the greater part of her life while her frocks were short, said —

"Why did you marry again, mamma? It would have been nicer if you had not."

Mrs. Davilow colored deeply, a slight convulsive movement passed over her face, and straightway shutting up the memorials she said, with a violence quite unusual in her—

"You have no feeling, child!"

Gwendolen, who was fond of her mamma, felt hurt and ashamed, and had never since dared to ask a question about her father.

This was not the only instance in which she had brought on herself the pain of some filial compunction. It was always arranged, when possible, that she should have a small bed in her mamma's room; for Mrs. Davilow's motherly tenderness clung chiefly to her eldest girl, who had been born in her happier time. One night under an attack of pain she found that the specific regularly placed by her bedside had been forgotten, and begged Gwendolen to get out of bed and reach it for her. That healthy young lady, snug and warm as a rosy infant in her little couch, objected to step out into the cold, and lying perfectly still,

grumbling a refusal. Mrs. Davilow went without the medicine and never reproached her daughter; but the next day Gwendolen was keenly conscious of what must be in her mamma's mind, and tried to make amends by caresses which cost her no effort. Having always been the pet and pride of the household, waited on by mother, sisters, governess and maids, as if she had been a princess in exile, she naturally found it difficult to think her own pleasure less important than others made it, and when it was positively thwarted felt an astonished resentment apt, in her cruder days, to vent itself in one of those passionate acts which look like a contradiction of habitual tendencies. Though never even as a child thoughtlessly cruel, nay delighting to rescue drowning insects and watch their recovery, there was a disagreeable silent remembrance of her having strangled her sister's canary-bird in a final fit of exasperation at its shrill singing which had again and again jarringly interrupted her own. She had taken pains to buy a white mouse for her sister in retribution, and though inwardly excusing herself on the ground of a peculiar sensitiveness which was a mark of her general superiority, the thought of that infelicious murder had always made her wince. Gwendolen's nature was not remorseless, but she liked to make her penances easy, and now that she was twenty and more, some of her native force had turned into a self-control by which she guarded herself from penitential humiliation. There was more show of fire and will in her than ever, but there was more calculation underneath it.

On this day of arrival at Offendene, which not even Mrs. Davilow had seen before—the place having been taken for her by her brother-in-law, Mr. Gascoigne—when all had got down from the carriage, and were standing under the porch in front of the open door, so that they could have a general view of the place and a glimpse of the stone hall and staircase hung with sombre pictures, but enlivened by a bright wood fire, no one spoke; mamma, the four sisters and the governess all looked at Gwendolen, as if their

feelings depended entirely on her decision. Of the girls, from Alice in her sixteenth year to Isabel in her tenth, hardly anything could be said on a first view, but that they were girlish, and that their black dresses were getting shabby. Miss Merry was elderly and altogether neutral in expression. Mrs. Davilow's worn beauty seemed the more pathetic for the look of entire appeal which she cast at Gwendolen, who was glancing round at the house, the landscape and the entrance hall with an air of rapid judgment. Imagine a young race-horse in the paddock among untrimmed ponies and patient hacks.

"Well, dear, what do you think of the place," said Mrs. Davilow at last, in a gentle, deprecatory tone.

"I think it is charming," said Gwendolen, quickly. "A romantic place; anything delightful may happen in it; it would be a good background for anything. No one need be ashamed of living here."

"There is certainly nothing common about it."

"Oh, it would do for fallen royalty or any sort of grand poverty. We ought properly to have been living in splendor, and have come down to this. It would have been as romantic as could be. But I thought my uncle and aunt Gascoigne would be here to meet us, and my cousin Anna," added Gwendolen, her tone changed to sharp surprise.

"We are early," said Mrs. Davilow, and entering the hall, she said to the housekeeper who came forward, "You expect Mr. and Mrs. Gascoigne?"

"Yes, madam; they were here yesterday to give particular orders about the fires and the dinner. But as to fires, I've had 'em in all the rooms for the last week, and everything is well aired. I could wish some of the furniture paid better for all the cleaning it's had, but I *think* you'll see the brasses have been done justice to. I *think* when Mr. and Mrs. Gascoigne come, they'll tell you nothing has been neglected. They'll be here at five, for certain."

This satisfied Gwendolen, who was not prepared to have their arrival treated with indifference; and after tripping a

little way up the matted stone staircase to take a survey there, she tripped down again, and followed by all the girls looked into each of the rooms opening from the hall—the dining-room all dark oak and worn red satin damask, with a copy of snarling, worrying dogs from Snyders over the side-board, and a Christ breaking bread over the mantel-piece; the library with a general aspect and smell of old brown-leather; and lastly, the drawing-room, which was entered through a small antechamber crowded with venerable knick-knacks.

"Mamma, mamma, pray come here!" said Gwendolen, Mrs. Davilow having followed slowly in talk with the housekeeper. "Here is an organ. I will be Saint Cecilia: some one shall paint me as Saint Cecilia. Jocosa (this was her name for Miss Merry), let down my hair. See, mamma?"

She had thrown off her hat and gloves, and seated herself before the organ in an admirable pose, looking upward; while the submissive and sad Jocosa took out the one comb which fastened the coil of hair, and then shook out the mass till it fell in a smooth light-brown stream far below its owner's slim waist.

Mrs. Davilow smiled and said, "A charming picture, my dear!" not indifferent to the display of her pet, even in the presence of a housekeeper. Gwendolen rose and laughed with delight. All this seemed quite to the purpose on entering a new house which was so excellent a background.

"What a queer, quaint, picturesque room!" she went on, looking about her. "I like these old embroidered chairs, and the garlands on the wainscot, and the pictures that may be anything. That one with the ribs—nothing but ribs and darkness—I should think that is Spanish, mamma."

"Oh, Gwendolen!" said the small Isabel, in a tone of astonishment, while she held open a hinged panel of the wainscot at the other end of the room.

Every one, Gwendolen first, went to look. The opened panel had disclosed the picture of an upturned dead face, from which an obscure figure seemed to be fleeing with

outstretched arms. "How horrible!" said Mrs. Davilow, with a look of mere disgust; but Gwendolen shuddered silently, and Isabel, a plain and altogether inconvenient child with an alarming memory, said—

"You will never stay in this room by yourself, Gwendolen."

"How dare you open things which were meant to be shut up, you perverse little creature?" said Gwendolen, in her angriest tone. Then snatching the panel out of the hand of the culprit, she closed it hastily, saying, "There is a lock—where is the key? Let the key be found, or else let one be made, and let nobody open it again; or rather, let the key be brought to me."

At this command to everybody in general Gwendolen turned with a face which was flushed in reaction from her chill shudder, and said, "Let us go up to our own room, mamma."

The housekeeper on searching found the key in the drawer of the cabinet close by the panel, and presently handed it to Bugle, the lady's-maid, telling her significantly to give it to her Royal Highness.

"I don't know what you mean, Mrs. Startin," said Bugle, who had been busy up-stairs during the scene in the drawing-room, and was rather offended at this irony in a new servant.

"I mean the young lady that's to command us all—and well worthy for looks and figure," replied Mrs. Startin in propitiation. "She'll know what key it is."

"If you have laid out what we want, go and see to the others, Bugle," Gwendolen had said, when she and Mrs. Davilow entered their black and yellow bedroom, where a pretty little white couch was prepared by the side of the black and yellow catafalque known as the best bed. "I will help mamma."

But her first movement was to go to the tall mirror between the windows, which reflected herself and the room completely, while her mamma sat down and also looked at the reflection.