JESSIE FOTHERGILL

THE FIRST VIOLIN


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A Novel

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Contact: DigiCat@okpublishing.info

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CHAPTER I.

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MISS HALLAM.

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“Wonderful weather for April!” Yes, it certainty was wonderful. I fully agreed with the sentiment expressed at different periods of the day by different members of my family; but I did not follow their example and seek enjoyment out-of-doors—pleasure in that balmy spring air. Trouble—the first trouble of my life—had laid her hand heavily upon me. The world felt disjointed and all upside-down; I very helpless and lonely in it. I had two sisters, I had a father and a mother; but none the less was I unable to share my grief with any one of them; nay, it had been an absolute relief to me when first one and then another of them had left the house, on business or pleasure intent, and I, after watching my father go down the garden-walk, and seeing the gate close after him, knew that, save for Jane, our domestic, who was caroling lustily to herself in the kitchen regions, I was alone in the house.

I was in the drawing-room. Once secure of solitude, I put down the sewing with which I had been pretending to employ myself, and went to the window—a pleasant, sunny bay. In that window stood a small work-table, with a flower-pot upon it containing a lilac primula. I remember it distinctly to this day, and I am likely to carry the recollection with me so long as I live. I leaned my elbows upon this table, and gazed across the fields, green with spring grass,

tenderly lighted by an April sun, to where the river—the Skern—shone with a pleasant, homely, silvery glitter, twining through the smiling meadows till he bent round the solemn overhanging cliff crowned with mournful firs, which went by the name of the Rifted or Riven Scaur.

In some such delightful mead might the white-armed Nausicaa have tossed her cowslip balls among the other maids; perhaps by some such river might Persephone have paused to gather the daffodil—“the fateful flower beside the rill.” Light clouds flitted across the sky, a waft of wind danced in at the open window, ruffling my hair mockingly, and bearing with it the deep sound of a church clock striking four.

As if the striking of the hour had been a signal for the breaking of a spell, the silence that had prevailed came to an end. Wheels came rolling along the road up to the door, which, however, was at the other side of the house. “A visitor for my father, no doubt,” I thought indifferently; “and he has gone out to read the funeral service for a dead parishioner. How strange! I wonder how clergymen and doctors can ever get accustomed to the grim contrasts amid which they live!”

I suffered my thoughts to wander off in some such track as this, but they were all through dominated by a heavy sense of oppression—the threatening hand of a calamity which I feared was about to overtake me, and I had again forgotten the outside world.

The door was opened. Jane held it open and said nothing (a trifling habit of hers, which used to cause me much annoyance), and a tall woman walked slowly into the room. I

rose and looked earnestly at her, surprised and somewhat nervous when I saw who she was—Miss Hallam, of Hallam Grange, our near neighbor, but a great stranger to us, nevertheless, so far, that is, as personal intercourse went.

“Your servant told me that every one was out except Miss May,” she remarked, in a harsh, decided voice, as she looked not so much at me as toward me, and I perceived that there was something strange about her eyes.

“Yes; I am sorry,” I began, doubtfully.

She had sallow, strongly marked, but proud and aristocratic features, and a manner with more than a tinge of imperiousness. Her face, her figure, her voice were familiar, yet strange to me—familiar because I had heard of her, and been in the habit of occasionally seeing her from my very earliest childhood; strange, because she was reserved and not given to seeing her neighbors’ houses for purposes either of gossip or hospitality. I was aware that about once in two years she made a call at our house, the vicarage, whether as a mark of politeness to us, or to show that, though she never entered a church, she still chose to lend her countenance and approval to the Establishment, or whether merely out of old use and habit, I knew not. I only knew that she came, and that until now it had never fallen to my lot to be present upon any of those momentous occasions.

Feeling it a little hard that my coveted solitude should thus be interrupted, and not quite knowing what to say to her, I sat down and there was a moment’s pause.

“Is your mother well?” she inquired.

“Yes, thank you, very well. She has gone with my sister to Darton.”

“Your father?”

“He is well too, thank you. He has a funeral this afternoon.”

“I think you have two sisters, have you not?”

“Yes; Adelaide and Stella.”

“And which are you?”

“May; I am the second one.”

All her questions were put in an almost severe tone, and not as if she took very much interest in me or mine. I felt my timidity increase, and yet—I liked her. Yes, I felt most distinctly that I liked her.

“May,” she remarked, meditatively; “May Wedderburn. Are you aware that you have a very pretty north-country sounding name?”

“I have not thought about it.”

“How old are you?”

“I am a little over seventeen.”

“Ah! And what do you do all day?”

“Oh!” I began, doubtfully, “not much, I am afraid, that is useful or valuable.”

“You are young enough yet. Don’t begin to do things with a purpose for some time to come. Be happy while you can.”

“I am not at all happy,” I replied, not thinking of what I was saying, and then feeling that I could have bitten my tongue out with vexation. What could it possibly matter to Miss Hallam whether I were happy or not? She was asking me all these questions to pass the time, and in order to talk about something while she sat in our house.

“What makes you unhappy? Are your sisters disagreeable?”

“Oh, no!”

“Are your parents unkind?”

“Unkind!” I echoed, thinking what a very extraordinary woman she was and wondering what kind of experience hers could have been in the past.

“Then I can not imagine what cause for unhappiness you can have,” she said, composedly.

I made no answer. I repented me of having uttered the words, and Miss Hallam went on:

“I should advise you to forget that there is such a thing as unhappiness. You will soon succeed.”

“Yes—I will try,” said I, in a low voice, as the cause of my unhappiness rose up, gaunt, grim and forbidding, with thin lips curved in a mocking smile, and glittering, snake-like eyes fixed upon my face. I shivered faintly; and she, though looking quickly at me, seemed to think she had said enough about my unhappiness. Her next question surprised me much.

“Are you fair in complexion?” she inquired.

“Yes,” said I. “I am very fair—fairer than either of my sisters. But are you near-sighted?”

“Near sight*less*,” she replied, with a bitter little laugh. “Cataract. I have so many joys in my life that Providence has thought fit to temper the sunshine of my lot. I am to content myself with the store of pleasant remembrances with which my mind is crowded, when I can see nothing outside. A delightful arrangement. It is what pious people call a ‘cross,’ or a ‘visitation,’ or something of that kind. I am

not pious, and I call it the destruction of what little happiness I had."

"Oh, I am very, very sorry for you," I answered, feeling what I spoke, for it had always been my idea of misery to be blind—shut away from the sunlight upon the fields, from the hue of the river, from all that "lust of the eye" which meets us on every side.

"But are you quite alone?" I continued. "Have you no one to—"

I stopped; I was about to add, "to be kind to you—to take care of you?" but I suddenly remembered that it would not do for me to ask such questions.

"No, I live quite alone," said she, abruptly. "Did you think of offering to relieve my solitude?"

I felt myself burning with a hot blush all over my face as I stammered out:

"I am sure I never thought of anything so impertinent, but—but—if there was anything I could do—read or—"

I stopped again. Never very confident in myself, I felt a miserable sense that I might have been going too far. I wished most ardently that my mother or Adelaide had been there to take the weight of such a conversation from my shoulders. What was my surprise to hear Miss Hallam say, in a tone quite smooth, polished, and polite:

"Come and drink tea with me to-morrow afternoon—afternoon tea I mean. You can go away again as soon as you like. Will you?"

"Oh, thank you. Yes, I will."

"Very well. I shall expect you between four and five. Good-afternoon."

“Let me come with you to your carriage,” said I, hastily. “Jane—our servant is so clumsy.”

I preceded her with care, saw her seated in her carriage and driven toward the Grange, which was but a few hundred yards from our own gates, and then I returned to the house. And as I went in again, my companion-shadow glided once more to my side with soft, insinuating, irresistible importunity, and I knew that it would be my faithful attendant for—who could say how long?

CHAPTER II.

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“Traversons gravement ce méchant mascarade qu’on appelle le monde”

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The houses in Skernford—the houses of “the gentry,” that is to say—lay almost all on one side an old-fashioned, sleepy-looking “green” toward which their entrances lay; but their real front, their pleasantest aspect, was on their other side, facing the river which ran below, and down to which their gardens sloped in terraces. Our house, the vicarage, lay nearest the church; Miss Hallam’s house, the Grange, furthest from the church. Between these, larger and more imposing, in grounds beside which ours seemed to dwindle down to a few flower-beds, lay Deeplish Hall, whose owner, Sir Peter Le Marchant, had lately come to live there, at least for a time.

It was many years since Sir Peter Le Marchant, whose image at this time was fated to enter so largely and so much against my will into all my calculations, had lived at or even visited his estate at Skernford. He was a man of immense property, and report said that Deeplish Hall, which we innocent villagers looked upon as such an imposing mansion, was but one and not the grandest of his several country houses. All that I knew of his history—or rather, all that I had heard of it, whether truly or not, I was in no position to say—was but a vague and misty account; yet

that little had given me a dislike to him before I ever met him.

Miss Hallam, our neighbor, who lived in such solitude and retirement, was credited with having a history—if report had only been able to fix upon what it was. She was popularly supposed to be of a grim and decidedly eccentric disposition. Eccentric she was, as I afterward found—as I thought when I first saw her. She seldom appeared either in church or upon any other public occasion, and was said to be the deadly enemy of Sir Peter Le Marchant and all pertaining to him. There was some old, far-back romance connected with it—a romance which I did not understand, for up to now I had never known either her or Sir Peter sufficiently to take any interest in the story, but the report ran that in days gone by—how far gone by, too, they must have been!—Miss Hallam, a young and handsome heiress, loved very devotedly her one sister, and that sister—so much was known as a fact—had become Lady Le Marchant: was not her monument in the church between the Deeplish Hall and the Hallam Grange pews? Was not the tale of her virtues and her years—seven-and-twenty only did she count of the latter—there recorded? That Barbara Hallam had been married to Sir Peter was matter of history: what was not matter of history, but of tradition which was believed in quite as firmly, was that the baronet had ill-treated his wife—in what way was not distinctly specified, but I have since learned that it was true; she was a gentle creature, and he made her life miserable unto her. She was idolized by her elder sister, who, burning with indignation at the treatment to which her darling had been subjected, had become, even

in disposition, an altered woman. From a cheerful, open-hearted, generous, somewhat brusque young person, she had grown into a prematurely old, soured, revengeful woman. It was to her that the weak and injured sister had fled; it was in her arms that she had died. Since her sister's death, Miss Hallam had withdrawn entirely from society, cherishing a perpetual grudge against Sir Peter Le Marchant. Whether she had relations or none, friends or acquaintance outside the small village in which she lived, none knew. If so, they limited their intercourse with her to correspondence, for no visitor ever penetrated to her damp old Grange, nor had she ever been known to leave it with the purpose of making any journey abroad. If perfect silence and perfect retirement could hush the tongues of tradition and report, then Miss Hallam's story should have been forgotten. But it was not forgotten. Such things never do become forgotten.

It was only since Sir Peter had appeared suddenly some six weeks ago at Deeplish Hall, that these dry bones of tradition had for me quickened into something like life, and had acquired a kind of interest for me.

Our father, as vicar of the parish, had naturally called upon Sir Peter, and as naturally invited him to his house. His visits had begun by his coming to lunch one day, and we had speculated about him a little in advance, half jestingly, raking up old stories, and attributing to him various evil qualities of a hard and loveless old age. But after he had gone, the verdict of Stella and myself was, "Much worse than we expected." He was different from what we had expected. Perhaps that annoyed us. Instead of being able to

laugh at him, we found something oppressive, chilling, to me frightful, in the cold, sneering smile which seemed perpetually hovering about his thin lips—in the fixed, snaky glitter of his still, intent gray eyes. His face was pale, his manners were polished, but to meet his eye was a thing I hated, and the touch of his hand made me shudder. While speaking in the politest possible manner, he had eyed over Adelaide and me in a manner which I do not think either of us had ever experienced before. I hated him from the moment in which I saw him looking at me with expression of approval. To be approved by Sir Peter Le Marchant, could fate devise anything more horrible? Yes, I knew now that it could; one might have to submit to the approval, to live in the approval. I had expressed my opinion on the subject with freedom to Adelaide, who to my surprise had not agreed with me, and had told me coldly that I had no business to speak disrespectfully of my father's visitors. I was silenced, but unhappy. From the first moment of seeing Sir Peter, I had felt an uncomfortable, uneasy feeling, which, had I been sentimental, I might have called a presentiment, but I was not sentimental. I was a healthy young girl of seventeen, believing in true love, and goodness, and gentleness very earnestly; "fancy free," having read few novels, and heard no gossip—a very baby in many respects. Our home might be a quiet one, a poor one, a dull one—our circle of acquaintance small, our distractions of the most limited description imaginable, but at least we knew no evil, and—I speak for Stella and myself—thought none. Our father and mother were persons with nothing whatever remarkable about them. Both had been handsome. My

mother was pretty, my father good-looking yet. I loved them both dearly. It had never entered my head to do otherwise than love them, but the love which made the star and the poetry of my quiet and unromantic life was that I bore to Adelaide, my eldest sister. I believed in her devotedly, and accepted her judgment, given in her own peculiar proud, decided way, upon every topic on which she chose to express it. She was one-and-twenty, and I used to think I could lay down my life for her.

It was consequently a shock to me to hear her speak in praise—yes, in praise of Sir Peter Le Marchant. My first impulse was to distrust my own judgment, but no; I could not long do so. He was repulsive; he was stealthy, hard, cruel, in appearance. I could not account for Adelaide's perversity in liking him, and passed puzzled days and racked my brain in conjecture as to why when Sir Peter came Adelaide should be always at home, always neat and fresh—not like me. Why was Adelaide, who found it too much trouble to join Stella and me in our homely concerts, always ready to indulge Sir Peter's taste for music, to entertain him with conversation?—and she *could* talk. She was unlike me in that respect. I never had a brilliant gift of conversation. She was witty about the things she did know, and never committed the fatal mistake of pretending to be up in the things she did not know. These gifts of mind, these social powers, were always ready for the edification of Sir Peter. By degrees the truth forced itself upon me. Some one said—I overheard it—that "that handsome Miss Wedderburn was undoubtedly setting her cap at Sir Peter Le Marchant." Never shall I forget the fury which at first possessed me, the

conviction which gradually stole over me that it was true. My sister Adelaide, beautiful, proud, clever—and, I had always thought, good,—had distinctly in view the purpose of becoming Lady Le Marchant. I shed countless tears over the miserable discovery, and dared not speak to her of it. But that was not the worst. My horizon darkened. One horrible day I discovered that it was I, and not Adelaide, who had attracted Sir Peter's attentions. It was not a scene, not a set declaration. It was a word in that smooth voice, a glance from that hated and chilling eye, which suddenly aroused me to the truth.

Shuddering, dismayed, I locked the matter up within my own breast, and wished with a longing that sometimes made me quite wretched that I could quit Skernford, my home, my life, which had lost zest for me, and was become a burden to me. The knowledge that Sir Peter admired me absolutely degraded me in my own eyes. I felt as if I could not hold up my head. I had spoken to no one of what had passed within me, and I trusted it had not been noticed; but all my joy was gone. It was as if I stood helpless while a noisome reptile coiled its folds around me.

To-day, after Miss Hallam's departure, I dropped into my now chronic state of listlessness and sadness. They all came back; my father from the church; my mother and Adelaide from Darton, whither they had been on a shopping expedition; Stella from a stroll by the river. We had tea, and they dispersed quite cheerfully to their various occupations. I, seeing the gloaming gently and dim falling over the earth, walked out of the house into the garden, and took my way toward the river. I passed an arbor in which Stella and I had

loved to sit and watch the stream, and talk and read Miss Austen’s novels. Stella was there now, with a well-thumbed copy of “Pride and Prejudice” in her hand.

“Come and sit down, May,” she apostrophized me. “Do listen to this about Bingley and Wickham.”

“No, thank you,” said I, abstractedly, and feeling that Stella was not the person to whom I could confide my woe. Indeed, on scanning mentally the list of my acquaintance, I found that there was not one in whom I could confide. It gave me a strange sense of loneliness and aloofness, and hardened me more than the reading of a hundred satires on the meannesses of society.

I went along the terrace by the river-side, and looked up to the left—traces of Sir Peter again. There was the terrace of Deeplish Hall, which stood on a height just above a bend in the river. It was a fine old place. The sheen of the glass houses caught the rays of the sun and glanced in them. It looked rich, old, and peaceful. I had been many a time through its gardens, and thought them beautiful, and wished they belonged to me. Now I felt that they lay in a manner at my feet, and my strongest feeling respecting them was an earnest wish that I might never see them again.

Thus agreeably meditating, I insensibly left our own garden and wandered on in the now quickly falling twilight into a narrow path leading across a sort of No-Man’s-Land into the demesne of Sir Peter Le Marchant. In my trouble I scarcely remarked where I was going, and with my eyes cast upon the ground was wishing that I could feel again as I once had felt, when

“I nothing had, and yet enough;”

and was sadly wondering what I could do to escape from the net in which I felt myself caught, when a shadow darkened the twilight in which I stood, and looking up I saw Sir Peter, and heard these words:

“Good-evening, Miss Wedderburn. Are you enjoying a little stroll?”

By, as it seemed to me, some strange miracle all my inward fears and tremblings vanished. I did not feel afraid of Sir Peter in the least. I felt that here was a crisis. This meeting would show me whether my fears had been groundless, and my own vanity and self-consciousness of unparalleled proportions, or whether I had judged truly, and had good reason for my qualms and anticipations.

It came. The alarm had not been a false one. Sir Peter, after conversing with me for a short time, did, in clear and unmistakable terms, inform me that he loved me, and asked me to marry him.

“I thank you,” said I, mastering my impulse to cover my face with my hands, and run shuddering away from him. “I thank you for the honor you offer me, and beg to decline it.”

He looked surprised, and still continued to urge me in a manner which roused a deep inner feeling of indignation within me, for it seemed to say that he understood me to be overwhelmed with the honor he proposed to confer upon me, and humored my timidity about accepting it. There was no doubt in his manner; not the shadow of a suspicion that I could be in earnest. There was something that turned my heart cold within me—a cool, sneering tone, which not all his professions of affection could disguise. Since that time I

have heard Sir Peter explicitly state his conception of the sphere of woman in the world; it was not an exalted one. He could not even now quite conceal that while he told me he wished to make me his wife and the partner of his heart and possessions, yet he knew that such professions were but words—that he did not sue for my love (poor Sir Peter! I doubt if ever in his long life he was blessed with even a momentary glimpse of the divine countenance of pure Love), but offered to buy my youth, and such poor beauty as I might have, with his money and his other worldly advantages.

Sir Peter was a blank, utter skeptic with regard to the worth of woman. He did not believe in their virtue nor their self-respect; he believed them to be clever actresses, and, taken all in all, the best kind of amusement to be had for money. The kind of opinion was then new to me; the effect of it upon my mind such as might be expected. I was seventeen, and an ardent believer in all things pure and of good report.

Nevertheless, I remained composed, sedate, even courteous to the last—till I had fairly made Sir Peter understand that no earthly power should induce me to marry him; till I had let him see that I fully comprehended the advantages of the position he offered me, and declined them.

“Miss Wedderburn,” said he, at last—and his voice was as unruffled as my own; had it been more angry I should have feared it less—“do you fear opposition? I do not think your parents would refuse their consent to our union.”

I closed my eyes for a moment, and a hand seemed to tighten about my heart. Then I said:

“I speak without reference to my parents. In such a matter I judge for myself.”

“Always the same answer?”

“Always the same, Sir Peter.”

“It would be most ungentlemanly to press the subject any further.” His eyes were fixed upon me with the same cold, snake-like smile. “I will not be guilty of such a solecism. Your family affections, my dear young lady, are strong, I should suppose. Which—whom do you love best?”

Surprised at the blunt straightforwardness of the question, as coming from him, I replied thoughtlessly, “Oh, my sister Adelaide.”

“Indeed! I should imagine she was in every way worthy the esteem of so disinterested a person as yourself. A different disposition, though—quite. Will you allow me to touch your hand before I retire?”

Trembling with uneasy forebodings roused by his continual sneering smile, and the peculiar evil light in his eyes, I yet went through with my duty to the end. He took the hand I extended, and raised it to his lips with a low bow.

“Good-evening, Miss Wedderburn.”

Faintly returning his valediction, I saw him go away, and then in a dream, a maze, a bewilderment, I too turned slowly away and walked to the house again. I felt, I knew I had behaved well and discreetly, but I had no confidence whatever that the matter was at an end.

CHAPTER III.

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“Lucifer, Star of the Morning! How art thou fallen!”

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I found myself, without having met any one of my family, in my own room, in the semi-darkness, seated on a chair by my bedside, unnerved, faint, miserable with a misery such as I had never felt before. The window was open, and there came up a faint scent of sweetbrier and wall-flowers in soft, balmy gusts, driven into the room by the April night wind. There rose a moon and flooded the earth with radiance. Then came a sound of footsteps; the door of the next room, that belonging to Adelaide, was opened. I heard her come in, strike a match, and light her candle; the click of the catch as the blind rolled down. There was a door between her room and mine, and presently she passed it, and bearing a candle in her hand, stood in my presence. My sister was very beautiful, very proud. She was cleverer, stronger, more decided than I, or rather, while she had those qualities very strongly developed, I was almost without them. She always held her head up, and had one of those majestic figures which require no back-boards to teach them uprightness, no master of deportment to instill grace into their movements. Her toilet and mine were not, as may be supposed, of very rich materials or varied character; but while my things always looked as bad of their kind as they could—fitted badly, sat badly, were creased and crumpled—hers always

had a look of freshness; she wore the merest old black merino as if it were velvet, and a muslin frill like a point-lace collar. There are such people in the world. I have always admired them, envied them, wondered at them from afar; it has never been my fate in the smallest degree to approach or emulate them.

Her pale face, with its perfect outlines, was just illumined by the candle she held, and the light also caught the crown of massive plaits which she wore around her head. She set the candle down. I sat still and looked at her.

“You are there, May,” she remarked.

“Yes,” was my subdued response.

“Where have you been all evening?”

“It does not matter to any one.”

“Indeed it does. You were talking to Sir Peter Le Marchant. I saw you meet him from my bedroom window.”

“Did you?”

“Did he propose to you?” she inquired, with a composure which seemed to me frightful. “Worldly,” I thought, was a weak word to apply to her, and I was suffering acutely.

“He did.”

“Well, I suppose it would be a little difficult to accept him.”

“I did not accept him.”

“What?” she inquired, as if she had not quite caught what I said.

“I refused him,” said I, slightly raising my voice.

“What are you telling me?”

“The truth.”

“Sir Peter has fif—”

“Don’t mention Sir Peter to me again,” said I, nervously, and feeling as if my heart would break. I had never quarreled with Adelaide before. No reconciliation afterward could ever make up for the anguish which I was going through now.

“Just listen to me,” she said, bending over me, her lips drawn together. “I ought to have spoken to you before. I don’t know whether you have ever given any thought to our position and circumstances. If not, it would be as well that you should do so now. Papa is fifty-five years old, and has three hundred a year. In the course of time he will die, and as his life is not insured, and he has regularly spent every penny of his income—naturally it would have been strange if he hadn’t—what is to become of us when he is dead?”

“We can work.”

“Work!” said she, with inexpressible scorn. “Work! Pray what can we do in the way of work? What kind of education have we had? The village school-mistress could make us look very small in the matter of geography and history. We have not been trained to work, and, let me tell you, May, unskilled labor does not pay in these days.”

“I am sure you can do anything, Adelaide, and I will teach singing. I can sing.”

“Pooh! Do you suppose that because you can take C in alt. you are competent to teach singing? You don’t know how to sing yourself yet. Your face is your fortune. So is mine my fortune. So is Stella’s her fortune. You have enjoyed yourself all your life; you have had seventeen years of play and amusement, and now you behave like a baby. You refuse to endure a little discomfort, as the price of

placing yourself and your family forever out of the reach of trouble and trial. Why, if you were Sir Peter’s wife, you could do what you liked with him. I don’t say anything about myself; but oh! May, I am ashamed of you, I am ashamed of you! I thought you had more in you. Is it possible that you are nothing but a romp—nothing but a vulgar tomboy? Good Heaven! If the chance had been mine!”

“What would you have done?” I whispered, subdued for the moment, but obstinate in my heart as ever.

“I am nobody now; no one knows me. But if I had had the chance that you have had to-night, in another year I would have been known and envied by half the women in England. Bah! Circumstances are too disgusting, too unkind!”

“Oh! Adelaide, nothing could have made up for being tied to that man,” said I, in a small voice; “and I am not ambitious.”

“Ambitious! You are selfish—downright, grossly, inordinately selfish. Do you suppose no one else ever had to do what they did not like? Why did you not stop to think instead of rushing away from the thing like some unreasoning animal?”

“Adelaide! Sir Peter! To marry him?” I implored in tears. “How could I? I should die of shame at the very thought. Who could help seeing that I had sold myself to him?”

“And who would think any the worse of you? And what if they did? With fifteen thousand a year you may defy public opinion.”

“Oh, don’t! don’t!” I cried, covering my face with my hands. “Adelaide, you will break my heart!”

Burying my face in the bed-quilt, I sobbed irrepressibly. Adelaide’s apparent unconsciousness of, or callousness to, the stabs she was giving me, and the anguish they caused me, almost distracted me.

She loosed my arm, remarking, with bitter vexation:

“I feel as if I could shake you!”

She left the room. I was left to my meditations. My head—my heart too—ached distractingly; my arm was sore where Adelaide had grasped it; I felt as if she had taken my mind by the shoulders and shaken it roughly. I fastened both doors of my room, resolving that neither she nor any one else should penetrate to my presence again that night.

What was I to do? Where to turn? I began now to realize that the *Res dom*, which had always seemed to me so abundant for all occasions, were really *Res Angusta*, and that circumstances might occur in which they would be miserably inadequate.

CHAPTER IV.

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"Zu Rathe gehen, und vom Rath zur That."

Briefe Beethoven's.

There was surely not much in Miss Hallam to encourage confidences; yet within half an hour of the time of entering her house I had told her all that oppressed my heart, and had gained a feeling of greater security than I had yet felt. I was sure that she would befriend me. True, she did not say so. When I told her about Sir Peter Le Marchant's proposal to me, about Adelaide's behavior; when, in halting and stammering tones, and interrupted by tears, I confessed that I had not spoken to my father or mother upon the subject, and that I was not quite sure of their approval of what I had done, she even laughed a little, but not in what could be called an amused manner. When I had finished my tale, she said:

"If I understand you, the case stands thus: You have refused Sir Peter Le Marchant, but you do not feel at all sure that he will not propose to you again. Is it not so?"

"Yes," I admitted.

"And you dread and shrink from the idea of a repetition of this business?"

"I feel as if it would kill me."

"It would not kill you. People are not so easily killed as all that; but it is highly unfit that you should be subjected to a

recurrence of it. I will think about it. Will you have the goodness to read me a page of this book?”

Much surprised at this very abrupt change of the subject, but not daring to make any observation upon it, I took the book—the current number of a magazine—and read a page to her.

“That will do,” said she. “Now, will you read this letter, also aloud?”

She put a letter into my hand, and I read: