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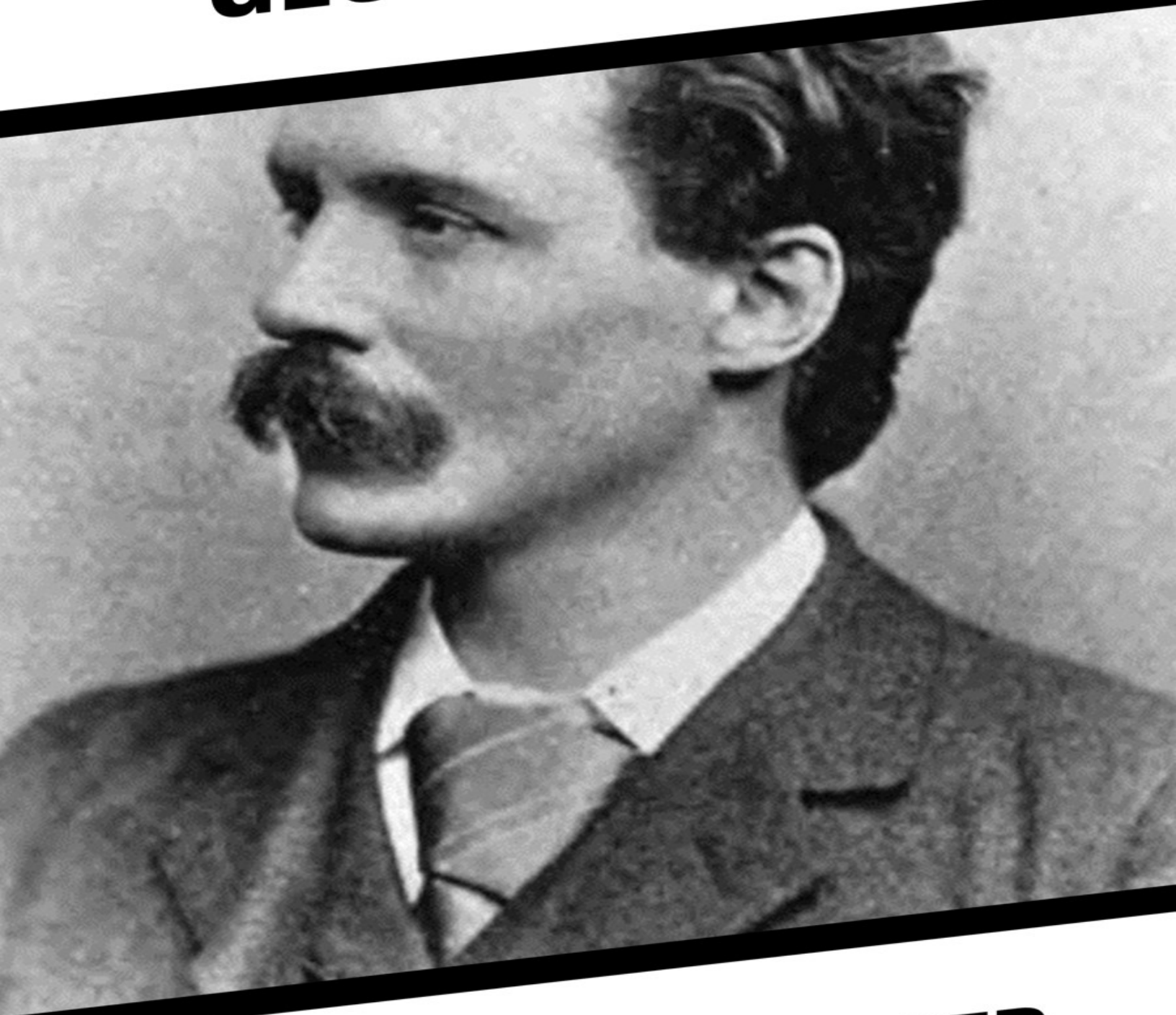
GEORGE GISSING



THE EMANCIPATED

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PART I.

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CHAPTER I

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NORTHERNERS IN SUNLIGHT

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By a window looking from Posillipo upon the Bay of Naples sat an English lady, engaged in letter-writing. She was only in her four-and-twentieth year, but her attire of subdued mourning indicated widowhood already at the stage when it is permitted to make quiet suggestion of freedom rather than distressful reference to loss; the dress, however, was severely plain, and its grey coldness, which would well have harmonized with an English sky in this month of November, looked alien in the southern sunlight. There was no mistaking her nationality; the absorption, the troubled earnestness with which she bent over her writing, were peculiar to a cast of features such as can be found only in our familiar island; a physiognomy not quite pure in outline, vigorous in general effect and in detail delicate; a proud young face, full of character and capacity, beautiful in chaste control. Sorrowful it was not, but its paleness and thinness expressed something more than imperfect health of body; the blue-grey eyes, when they wandered for a

moment in an effort of recollection, had a look of weariness, even of ennui; the lips moved as if in nervous impatience until she had found the phrase or the thought for which her pen waited. Save for these intervals, she wrote with quick decision, in a large clear hand, never underlining, but frequently supplying the emphasis of heavy stroke in her penning of a word. At the end of her letters came a signature excellent in individuality: "Miriam Baske."

The furniture of her room was modern, and of the kind demanded by wealthy *forestieri* in the lodgings they condescend to occupy. On the variegated tiles of the floor were strewn rugs and carpets; the drapery was bright, without much reference to taste in the ordering of hues; a handsome stove served at present to support leafy plants, a row of which also stood on the balcony before the window. Round the ceiling ran a painted border of foliage and flowers. The chief ornament of the walls was a large and indifferent copy of Raphael's "St. Cecilia;" there were, too, several *gouache* drawings of local scenery: a fiery night-view of Vesuvius, a panorama of the Bay, and a very blue Blue Grotto. The whole was blithe, sunny, Neapolitan; sufficiently unlike a sitting-room in Redbeck House, Bartles, Lancashire, which Mrs. Baske had in her mind as she wrote.

A few English books lay here and there, volumes of unattractive binding, and presenting titles little suggestive of a holiday in Campania; works which it would be misleading to call theological; the feeblest modern echoes of fierce old Puritans, half shame-faced modifications of logic which, at all events, was wont to conceal no consequence of its savage premises. More noticeable were some architectural plans unrolled upon a settee; the uppermost represented the elevation of a building designed

for religious purposes, painfully recognizable by all who know the conventicles of sectarian England. On the blank space beneath the drawing were a few comments, lightly pencilled.

Having finished and addressed some half a dozen brief letters, Mrs. Baske brooded for several minutes before she began to write on the next sheet of paper. It was intended for her sister-in-law, a lady of middle age, who shared in the occupancy of Redbeck House. At length she penned the introductory formula, but again became absent, and sat gazing at the branches of a pine-tree which stood in strong relief against cloudless blue. A sigh, an impatient gesture, and she went on with her task.

"It is very kind of you to be so active in attending to the things which you know I have at heart. You say I shall find everything as I could wish it on my return, but you cannot think what a stranger to Bartles I already feel. It will soon be six months since I lived my real life there; during my illness I might as well have been absent, then came those weeks in the Isle of Wight, and now this exile. I feel it as exile, bitterly. To be sure Naples is beautiful, but it does not interest me. You need not envy me the bright sky, for it gives me no pleasure. There is so much to pain and sadden; so much that makes me angry. On Sunday I was miserable. The Spences are as kind as any one could be, but—I won't write about it; no doubt you understand me.

"What do you think ought to be done about Mrs. Ackworth and her daughter? It is shameful, after all they have received from me. Will you tell them that I am gravely displeased to hear of their absenting themselves from chapel. I have a very good mind to write to Mr. Higginson and beg him to suspend the girl from his employment until she becomes regular in her attendance at

worship. Perhaps that would seem malicious, but she and her mother ought to be punished in some way. Speak to them very sternly.

"I do not understand how young Brooks has dared to tell you I promised him work in the greenhouse. He is irreclaimable; the worst character that ever came under my notice; he shall not set foot on the premises. If he is in want, he has only himself to blame. I do not like to think of his wife suffering, but it is the attribute of sins such as his that they involve the innocent with the guilty; and then she has shown herself so wretchedly weak. Try, however, to help her secretly if her distress becomes too acute.

"It was impertinent in Mrs. Walker to make such reference to me in public. This is the result of my absence and helplessness. I shall write to her—two lines."

A flush had risen to her cheek, and in adding the last two words she all but pierced through the thin note-paper. Then her hand trembled so much that she was obliged to pause. At the same moment there sounded a tap at the door, and, on Mrs. Baske's giving permission, a lady entered. This was Mrs. Spence, a cousin of the young widow; she and her husband had an apartment here in the Villa Sannazaro, and were able to devote certain rooms to the convenience of their relative during her stay at Naples. Her age was about thirty; she had a graceful figure, a manner of much refinement, and a bright, gentle, intellectual face, which just now bore an announcement of news.

"They have arrived!"

"Already?" replied the other, in a tone of civil interest.

"They decided not to break the journey after Genoa. Cecily and Mrs. Lessingham are too tired to do anything

but get settled in their rooms, but Mr. Mallard has come to tell us."

Miriam laid down her pen, and asked in the same voice as before:

"Shall I come?"

"If you are not too busy." And Mrs. Spence added, with a smile, "I should think you must have a certain curiosity to see each other, after so long an acquaintance at secondhand."

"I will come in a moment."

Mrs. Spence left the room. For a minute Miriam sat reflecting, then rose. In moving towards the door she chanced to see her image in a mirror—two of a large size adorned the room—and it checked her step; she regarded herself gravely, and passed a smoothing hand over the dark hair above her temples.

By a corridor she reached her friends' sitting-room, where Mrs. Spence sat in the company of two gentlemen. The elder of these was Edward Spence. His bearded face, studious of cast and small-featured, spoke a placid, self-commanding character; a lingering smile, and the pleasant wrinkles about his brow, told of a mind familiar with many by-ways of fancy and reflection. His companion, a man of five-and-thirty, had a far more striking countenance. His complexion was of the kind which used to be called adust—burnt up with inner fires; his visage was long and somewhat harshly designed, very apt, it would seem, to the expression of hidden ironies or stern resentments, but at present bright with friendly pleasure. He had a heavy moustache, but no beard; his hair tumbled in disorder. To matters of costume he evidently gave little thought, for his

clothes, though of the kind a gentleman would wear in travelling, had seen their best days, and the waistcoat even lacked one of its buttons; his black necktie was knotted into an indescribable shape, and the ends hung loose.

Him Mrs. Spence at once presented to her cousin as "Mr. Mallard." He bowed ungracefully; then, with a manner naturally frank but constrained by obvious shyness, took the hand Miriam held to him.

"We are scarcely strangers, Mr. Mallard," she said in a self-possessed tone, regarding him with steady eyes.

"Miss Doran has spoken of you frequently on the journey," he replied, knitting his brows into a scowl as he smiled and returned her look. "Your illness made her very anxious. You are much better, I hope?"

"Much, thank you."

Allowance made for the difference of quality in their voices, Mrs. Baske and Mallard resembled each other in speech. They had the same grave note, the same decision.

"They must be very tired after their journey," Miriam added, seating herself.

"Miss Doran seems scarcely so at all; but Mrs. Lessingham is rather over-wearied, I'm afraid."

"Why didn't you break the journey at Florence or Rome?" asked Mrs. Spence.

"I proposed it, but other counsels prevailed. All through Italy Miss Doran was distracted between desire to get to Naples and misery at not being able to see the towns we

passed. At last she buried herself in the 'Revue des Deux Mondes,' and refused even to look out of the window."

"I suppose we may go and see her in the morning?" said Miriam.

"My express instructions are," replied Mallard, "that you are on no account to go. They will come here quite early. Miss Doran begged hard to come with me now, but I wouldn't allow it."

"Is it the one instance in which your authority has prevailed?" inquired Spence. "You seem to declare it in a tone of triumph."

"Well," replied the other, with a grim smile, leaning forward in his chair, "I don't undertake to lay down rules for the young lady of eighteen as I could for the child of twelve. But my age and sobriety of character still ensure me respect."

He glanced at Mrs. Baske, and their eyes met. Miriam smiled rather coldly, but continued to observe him after he had looked away again.

"You met them at Genoa?" she asked presently, in her tone of habitual reserve.

"Yes. I came by sea from London, and had a couple of days to wait for their arrival from Paris."

"And I suppose you also are staying at Mrs. Gluck's?"

"Oh no! I have a room at old quarters of mine high up in the town, Vico Brancaccio. I shall only be in Naples a few days."

"How's that?" inquired Spence.

"I'm going to work at Amalfi and Paestum."

"Then, as usual, we shall see nothing of you," said Mrs. Spence. "Pray, do you dine at Mrs. Gluck's this evening?"

"By no means."

"May we, then, have the pleasure of your company? There is no need to go back to Vico Brancaccio. I am sure Mrs. Baske will excuse you the torture of uniform."

With a sort of grumble, the invitation was accepted. A little while after, Spence proposed to his friend a walk before sunset.

"Yes; let us go up the hill," said Mallard, rising abruptly. "I need movement after the railway."

They left the villa, and Mallard grew less restrained in his conversation.

"How does Mrs. Baske answer to your expectations?" Spence asked him.

"I had seen her photograph, you know."

"Where?"

"Her brother showed it me—one taken at the time of her marriage."

"What is Elgar doing at present?"

"It's more than a year since we crossed each other," Mallard replied. "He was then going to the devil as speedily

as can in reason be expected of a man. I happened to encounter him one morning at Victoria Station, and he seemed to have just slept off a great deal of heavy drinking. Told me he was going down to Brighton to see about selling a houseful of furniture there—his own property. I didn't inquire how or why he came possessed of it. He is beyond help, I imagine. When he comes to his last penny, he'll probably blow his brains out; just the fellow to do that kind of thing."

"I suppose he hasn't done it already? His sister has heard nothing of him for two years at least, and this account of yours is the latest I have received."

"I should think he still lives, He would be sure to make a *coup de theatre* of his exit."

"Poor lad!" said the elder man, with feeling. "I liked him."

"Why, so did I; and I wish it had been in my scope to keep him in some kind of order. Yes, I liked him much. And as for brains, why, I have scarcely known a man who so impressed me with a sense of his ability. But you could see that he was doomed from his cradle. Strongly like his sister in face."

"I'm afraid the thought of him troubles her a good deal."

"She looks ill."

"Yes; we are uneasy about her," said Spence. Then, with a burst of impatience: "There's no getting her mind away from that pestilent Bartles. What do you think she is projecting now? It appears that the Dissenters of Bartles are troubled concerning their chapel; it isn't large enough. So Miriam proposes to pull down her own house, and build them a chapel on the site, of course at her own expense. The ground being her freehold, she can unfortunately do

what she likes with it; the same with her personal property. The thing has gone so far that a Manchester firm of architects have prepared plans; they are lying about in her room here."

Mallard regarded the speaker with humorous wonder.

"And the fact is," pursued Spence, "that such an undertaking as this will impoverish her. She is not so wealthy as to be able to lay out thousands of pounds and leave her position unaltered."

"I suppose she lives only for her religious convictions?"

"I don't profess to understand her. Her character is not easily sounded. But no doubt she has the puritanical spirit in a rather rare degree. I daily thank the fates that my wife grew up apart from that branch of the family. Of all the accursed—But this is an old topic; better not to beat one's self uselessly."

"A Puritan at Naples," mused Mallard. "The situation is interesting."

"Very. But then she doesn't really live in Naples. From the first day she has shown herself bent on resisting every influence of the place. She won't admit that the climate benefits her; she won't allow an expression of interest in anything Italian to escape her. I doubt whether we shall ever get her even to Pompeii. One afternoon I persuaded her to walk up here with me, and tried to make her confess that this view was beautiful. She grudged making any such admission. It is her nature to *distrust* the beautiful."

"To be sure. That is the badge of her persuasion."

"Last Sunday we didn't know whether to compassionate her or to be angry with her. The Bradshaws are at Mrs. Gluck's. You know them by name, I think? There again, an interesting study, in a very different way. Twice in the day she shut herself up with them in their rooms, and they held a dissident service. The hours she spent here were passed in the solitude of her own room, lest she should witness our profane enjoyment of the fine weather. Eleanor refrained from touching the piano, and at meals kept the gravest countenance, in mere kindness. I doubt whether that is right. It isn't as though we were dealing with a woman whose mind is hopelessly—immatured; she is only a girl still, and I know she has brains if she could be induced to use them."

"Mrs. Baske has a remarkable face, it seems to me," said Mallard.

"It enrages me to talk of the matter."

They were now on the road which runs along the ridge of Posillipo; at a point where it is parted only by a low wall from the westward declivity, they paused and looked towards the setting sun.

"What a noise from Fuorigrotta!" murmured Spence, when he had leaned for a moment on the wall. "It always amuses me. Only in this part of the world could so small a place make such a clamour."

They were looking away from Naples. At the foot of the vine-covered hillside lay the noisy village, or suburb, named from its position at the outer end of the tunnel which the Romans pierced to make a shorter way between Naples and Puteoli; thence stretched an extensive plain, set in a deep amphitheatre of hills, and bounded by the sea.

Vineyards and maizefields, pine-trees and poplars, diversify its surface, and through the midst of it runs a long, straight road, dwindling till it reaches the shore at the hamlet of Bagnoli. Follow the enclosing ridge to the left, to where its slope cuts athwart plain and sea and sky; there close upon the coast lies the island rock of Nisida, meeting-place of Cicero and Brutus after Caesar's death. Turn to the opposite quarter of the plain. First rises the cliff of Camaldoli, where from their oak-shadowed lawn the monks look forth upon as fair a prospect as is beheld by man. Lower hills succeed, hiding Pozzuoli and the inner curve of its bay; behind them, too, is the nook which shelters Lake Avernus; and at a little distance, by the further shore, are the ruins of Cumae, first home of the Greeks upon Italian soil. A long promontory curves round the gulf; the dark crag at the end of it is Cape Misenum, and a little on the hither side, obscured in remoteness, lies what once was Baiae. Beyond the promontory gleams again a blue line of sea. The low length of Procida is its limit, and behind that, crowning the view, stands the mountain-height of Ischia.

Over all, the hues of an autumn evening in Campania. From behind a bulk of cloud, here and there tossed by high wind currents into fantastic shapes, sprang rays of fire, burning to the zenith. Between the sea-beach at Bagnoli and the summit of Ischia, tract followed upon tract of colour that each moment underwent a subtle change, darkening here, there fading into exquisite transparencies of distance, till by degrees the islands lost projection and became mere films against the declining day. The plain was ruddy with dead vine-leaves, and golden with the decaying foliage of the poplars; Camaldoli and its neighbour heights stood gorgeously enrobed. In itself, a picture so beautiful that the eye wearied with delight; in its memories, a source of solemn joy, inexhaustible for ever.

"I suppose," said Mallard, in the undertone of reflection, "the pagan associations of Naples are a great obstacle to Mrs. Baske's enjoyment of the scenery."

"She admits that."

"By-the-bye, what are likely to be the relations between her and Miss Doran?"

"I have wondered. They seem to keep on terms of easy correspondence. But doesn't Cecily herself throw any light on that point?"

Mallard made a pause before answering.

"You must remember that I know very little of her. I have never spoken more intimately with her than you yourself have. Naturally, since she has ceased to be a child, I have kept my distance. In fact, I shall be heartily glad when the next three years are over, and we can shake hands with a definite good-bye."

"What irritates you?" inquired Spence, with a smile which recognized a phase of his friend's character.

"The fact of my position. A nice thing for a fellow like me to have charge of a fortune! It oppresses me—the sense of responsibility; I want to get the weight off my shoulders. What the deuce did her father mean by burdening me in this way?"

"He foresaw nothing of the kind," said Spence, amused. "Only the unlikely event of Trench's death left you sole trustee. If Doran purposed anything at all—why, who knows what it may have been?"

Mallard refused to meet the other's look; his eyes were fixed on the horizon.

"All the same, the event was possible, and he should have chosen another man of business. It's worse than being rich on my own account. I have dreams of a national repudiation of debt; I imagine dock-companies failing and banks stopping payment. It disturbs my work; I am tired of it. Why can't I transfer the affair to some trustworthy and competent person; yourself, for instance? Why didn't Doran select you, to begin with—the natural man to associate with Trench?"

"Who never opened a book save his ledger; who was the model of a reputable dealer in calicoes; who—"

"I apologize," growled Mallard. "But you know in what sense I spoke."

"Pray, what has Cecily become since I saw her in London?" asked the other, after a pause, during which he smiled his own interpretation of Mallard's humour.

"A very superior young person, I assure you," was the reply, gravely spoken. "Miss Doran is a young woman of her time; she ranks with the emancipated; she is as far above the Girton girl as that interesting creature is above the product of an establishment for young ladies. Miss Doran has no prejudices, and, in the vulgar sense of the word, no principles. She is familiar with the Latin classics and with the Parisian feuilletons; she knows all about the newest religion, and can tell you Sarcey's opinion of the newest play. Miss Doran will discuss with you the merits of Sarah Bernhardt in 'La Dame aux Camelias,' or the literary theories of the brothers Goncourt. I am not sure that she knows much about Shakespeare, but her appreciation of

Baudelaire is exquisite. I don't think she is naturally very cruel, but she can plead convincingly the cause of vivisection. Miss Doran—"

Spence interrupted him with a burst of laughter.

"All which, my dear fellow, simply means that you—"

Mallard, in his turn, interrupted gruffly.

"Precisely: that I am the wrong man to hold even the position of steward to one so advanced. What have I to do with heiresses and fashionable ladies? I have my work to get on with, and it shall not suffer from the intrusion of idlers."

"I see you direct your diatribe half against Mrs. Lessingham. How has she annoyed you?"

"Annoyed me? You never were more mistaken. It's with myself that I am annoyed."

"On what account?"

"For being so absurd as to question sometimes whether my responsibility doesn't extend beyond stock and share. I ask myself whether Doran—who so befriended me, and put such trust in me, and paid me so well in advance for the duties I was to undertake—didn't take it for granted that I should exercise some influence in the matter of his daughter's education? Is she growing up what he would have wished her to be? And if—"

"Why, it's no easy thing to say what views he had on this subject. The lax man, we know, is often enough severe with his own womankind. But as you have given me no description of what Cecily really is, I can offer no judgment.

Wait till I have seen her. Doubtless she fulfils her promise of being beautiful?"

"Yes; there is no denying her beauty."

"As for her *modonite*, why, Mr. Ross Mallard is a singular person to take exception on that score."

"I don't know about that. When did I say that the modern woman was my ideal?"

"When had you ever a good word for the system which makes of woman a dummy and a kill-joy?"

"That has nothing to do with the question," replied Mallard, preserving a tone of gruff impartiality. "Have I been faithful to my stewardship? When I consented to Cecily's—to Miss Doran's passing from Mrs. Elgar's care to that of Mrs. Lessingham, was I doing right?"

"Mallard, you are a curious instance of the Puritan conscience surviving in a man whose intellect is liberated. The note of your character, including your artistic character, is this conscientiousness. Without it, you would have had worldly success long ago. Without it, you wouldn't talk nonsense of Cecily Doran. Had you rather she were co-operating with Mrs. Baske in a scheme to rebuild all the chapels in Lancashire?"

"There is a medium."

"Why, yes. A neither this nor that, an insipid refinement, a taste for culture moderated by reverence for Mrs. Grundy."

"Perhaps you are right. It's only occasionally that I am troubled in this way. But I heartily wish the three years

remaining were over."

"And the 'definite good-bye' spoken. A good phrase, that of yours. What possessed you to come here just now, if it disturbs you to be kept in mind of these responsibilities?"

"I should find it hard to tell you. The very sense of responsibility, I suppose. But, as I said, I am not going to stay in Naples."

"You'll come and give us a 'definite good-bye' before you leave?"

Mallard said nothing, but turned and began to move on. They passed one of the sentry-boxes which here along the ridge mark the limits of Neapolitan excise; a boy-soldier, musket in hand, cast curious glances at them. After walking in silence for a few minutes, they began to descend the eastern face of the hill, and before them lay that portion of the great gulf which pictures have made so familiar. The landscape was still visible in all its main details, still softly suffused with warm colours from the west. About the cone of Vesuvius a darkly purple cloud was gathering; the twin height of Somma stood clear and of a rich brown. Naples, the many-coloured, was seen in profile, climbing from the Castel dell' Ovo, around which the sea slept, to the rock of Sant' Elmo; along the curve of the Chiaia lights had begun to glimmer. Far withdrawn, the craggy promontory of Sorrento darkened to profoundest blue; and Capri veiled itself in mist.

CHAPTER II

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CECILY DORAN

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Villa Sannazaro had no architectural beauty; it was a building of considerable size, irregular, in need of external repair. Through the middle of it ran a great archway, guarded by copies of the two Molossian hounds which stand before the Hall of Animals in the Vatican; beneath the arch, on the right-hand side, was the main entrance to the house. If you passed straight through, you came out upon a terrace, where grew a magnificent stone-pine and some robust agaves. The view hence was uninterrupted, embracing the line of the bay from Posillipo to Cape Minerva. From the parapet bordering the platform you looked over a descent of twenty feet, into a downward sloping vineyard. Formerly the residence of an old Neapolitan family, the villa had gone the way of many such ancestral abodes, and was now let out among several tenants.

The Spences were established here for the winter. On the occasion of his marriage, three years ago, Edward Spence relinquished his connection with a shipping firm, which he represented in Manchester, and went to live in London; a year and a half later he took his wife to Italy, where they had since remained. He was not wealthy, but had means sufficient to his demands and prospects. Thinking for himself in most matters, he chose to abandon money-making at the juncture when most men deem it incumbent

upon them to press their efforts in that direction; business was repugnant to him, and he saw no reason why he should sacrifice his own existence to put a possible family in more than easy circumstances, He had the inclinations of a student, but was untroubled by any desire to distinguish himself, freedom from the demands of the office meant to him the possibility of living where he chose, and devoting to his books the best part of the day instead of its fragmentary leisure. His choice in marriage was most happy. Eleanor Spence had passed her maiden life in Manchester, but with parents of healthy mind and of more literature than generally falls to the lot of a commercial family. Pursuing a natural development, she allied herself with her husband's freedom of intellect, and found her nature's opportunities in the life which was to him most suitable. By a rare chance, she was the broader-minded of the two, the more truly impartial. Her emancipation from dogma had been so gradual, so unconfused by external pressure, that from her present standpoint she could look back with calmness and justice on all the stages she had left behind. With her cousin Miriam she could sympathize in a way impossible to Spence, who, by-the-bye, somewhat misrepresented his wife in the account he gave to Mallard of their Sunday experiences. Puritanism was familiar to her by more than speculation; in the compassion with which she regarded Miriam there was no mixture of contempt, as in her husband's case. On the other hand, she did not pretend to read completely her cousin's heart and mind; she knew that there was no simple key to Miriam's character, and the quiet study of its phases from day to day deeply interested her.

Cecily Doran had been known to Spence from childhood; her father was his intimate friend. But Eleanor had only made the girl's acquaintance in London, just after her marriage, when Cecily was spending a season there with

her aunt, Mrs. Lessingham. Mallard's ward was then little more than fifteen; after several years of weak health, she had entered upon a vigorous maidenhood, and gave such promise of free, joyous, aspiring life as could not but strongly affect the sympathies of a woman like Eleanor. Three years prior to that, at the time of her father's death, Cecily was living with Mrs. Elgar, a widow, and her daughter Miriam, the latter on the point of marrying (at eighteen) one Mr. Baske, a pietistic mill-owner, aged fifty. It then seemed very doubtful whether Cecily would live to mature years; she had been motherless from infancy, and the difficulty with those who brought her up was to repress an activity of mind which seemed to be one cause of her bodily feebleness. In those days there was a strong affection between her and Miriam Elgar, and it showed no sign of diminution in either when, on Mrs. Elgar's death, a year and a half after Miriam's marriage, Cecily passed into the care of her father's sister, a lady of moderate fortune, of parts and attainments, and with a great love of cosmopolitan life. A few months more and Mrs. Baske was to be a widow, childless, left in possession of some eight hundred a year, her house at Bartles, and a local importance to which she was not indifferent. With the exception of her brother, away in London, she had no near kin. It would now have been a great solace to her if Cecily Doran could have been her companion; but the young girl was in Paris, or Berlin, or St. Petersburg, and, as Miriam was soon to learn, the material distance between them meant little in comparison with the spiritual remoteness which resulted from Cecily's education under Mrs. Lessingham. They corresponded, however, and at first frequently; but letters grew shorter on both sides, and arrived less often. The two were now to meet for the first time since Cecily was a child of fourteen.

The ladies arrived at the villa about eleven o'clock. Miriam had shown herself indisposed to speak of them, both last evening, when Mallard was present, and again this morning when alone with her relatives; at breakfast she was even more taciturn than usual, and kept her room for an hour after the meal. Then, however, she came to sit with Eleanor, and remained when the visitors were announced.

Mrs. Lessingham did not answer to the common idea of a strong-minded woman. At forty-seven she preserved much natural grace of bearing, a good complexion, pleasantly mobile features. Her dress was in excellent taste, tending to elaboration, such as becomes a lady who makes some figure in the world of ease. Little wrinkles at the outer corners of her eyes assisted her look of placid thoughtfulness; when she spoke, these were wont to disappear, and the expression of her face became an animated intelligence, an eager curiosity, or a vivacious good-humour. Her lips gave a hint of sarcasm, but this was reserved for special occasions; as a rule her habit of speech was suave, much observant of amenities. One might have imagined that she had enjoyed a calm life, but this was far from being the case. The daughter of a country solicitor, she married early—for love, and the issue was disastrous. Above her right temple, just at the roots of the hair, a scar was discoverable; it was the memento of an occasion on which her husband aimed a blow at her with a mantelpiece ornament, and came within an ace of murder. Intimates of the household said that the provocation was great—that Mrs. Lessingham's gift of sarcasm had that morning displayed itself much too brilliantly. Still, the missile was an extreme retort, and on the whole it could not be wondered at that husband and wife resolved to live apart in future. Mr. Lessingham was, in fact, an aristocratic boor, and his wife never puzzled so much over any intellectual difficulty

as she did over the question how, as a girl, she came to imagine herself enamoured of him. She was not, perhaps, singular in her concernment with such a personal problem.

"It is six years since I was in Italy," she said, when greetings were over, and she had seated herself. "Don't you envy me my companion, Mrs. Spence? If anything could revive one's first enjoyment, it would be the sight of Cecily's."

Cecily was sitting by Miriam, whose hand she had only just relinquished. Her anxious and affectionate inquiries moved Miriam to a smile which seemed rather of indulgence than warm kindness.

"How little we thought where our next meeting would be!" Cecily was saying, when the eyes of the others turned upon her at her aunt's remark.

Noble beauty can scarcely be dissociated from harmony of utterance; voice and visage are the correspondent means whereby spirit addresses itself to the ear and eye. One who had heard Cecily Doran speaking where he could not see her, must have turned in that direction, have listened eagerly for the sounds to repeat themselves, and then have moved forward to discover the speaker. The divinest singer may leave one unaffected by the tone of her speech. Cecily could not sing, but her voice declared her of those who think in song, whose minds are modulated to the poetry, not to the prose, of life.

Her enunciation had the peculiar finish which is acquired in intercourse with the best cosmopolitan society, the best in a worthy sense. Four years ago, when she left Lancashire, she had a touch of provincial accent—Miriam, though she spoke well, was not wholly free from it—but

now it was impossible to discover by listening to her from what part of England she came. Mrs. Lessingham, whose admirable tact and adaptability rendered her unimpeachable in such details, had devoted herself with artistic zeal to her niece's training for the world; the pupil's natural aptitude ensured perfection in the result. Cecily's manner accorded with her utterance; it had every charm derivable from youth, yet nothing of immaturity. She was as completely at her ease as Mrs. Lessingham, and as much more graceful in her self-control as the advantages of nature made inevitable.

Miriam looked very cold, very severe, very English, by the side of this brilliant girl. The thinness and pallor of her features became more noticeable; the provincial faults of her dress were painfully obvious. Cecily was not robust, but her form lacked no development appropriate to her years, and its beauty was displayed by Parisian handiwork. In this respect, too, she had changed remarkably since Miriam last saw her, when she was such a frail child. Her hair of dark gold showed itself beneath a hat which Eleanor Spence kept regarding with frank admiration, so novel it was in style, and so perfectly suitable to its wearer. Her gloves, her shoes, were no less perfect; from head to foot nothing was to be found that did not become her, that was not faultless in its kind.

At the same time, nothing that suggested idle expense or vanity. To dwell at all upon the subject would be a disproportion, but for the note of contrast that was struck. In an assembly of well-dressed people, no one would have remarked Cecily's attire, unless to praise its quiet distinction. In the Spences' sitting-room it became another matter; it gave emphasis to differences of character; it distinguished the atmosphere of Cecily's life from that breathed by her old friends.

"We are going to read together Goethe's 'Italienische Reise,'" continued Mrs. Lessingham. "It was of quite infinite value to me when I first was here. In each town I *tuned* my thoughts by it, to use a phrase which sounds like affectation, but has a very real significance."

"It was much the same with me," observed Spence.

"Yes, but you had the inestimable advantage of knowing the classics. And Cecily, I am thankful to say, at least has something of Latin; an ode of Horace, which I look at with fretfulness, yields her its meaning. Last night, when I was tired and willing to be flattered, she tried to make me believe it was not yet too late to learn."

"Surely not," said Eleanor, gracefully.

"But Goethe—you remember he says that the desire to see Italy had become an illness with him. I know so well what that means. Cecily will never know; the happiness has come before longing for it had ceased to be a pleasure."

It was not so much affection as pride that her voice expressed when she referred to her niece; the same in her look, which was less tender than gratified and admiring. Cecily smiled in return, but was not wholly attentive; her eyes constantly turned to Miriam, endeavouring, though vainly, to exchange a glance.

Mrs. Lessingham was well aware of the difficulty of addressing to Mrs. Baske any remark on natural topics which could engage her sympathy, yet to ignore her presence was impossible.

"Do you think of seeing Rome and the northern cities when your health is established?" she inquired, in a voice