WILKIE COLLINS

HEART AND SCIENCE

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A Story of the Present Time

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Contact: DigiCat@okpublishing.info

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CHAPTER I.

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The weary old nineteenth century had advanced into the last twenty years of its life.

Towards two o’clock in the afternoon, Ovid Vere (of the Royal College of Surgeons) stood at the window of his consulting-room in London, looking out at the summer sunshine, and the quiet dusty street.

He had received a warning, familiar to the busy men of our time—the warning from overwrought Nature, which counsels rest after excessive work. With a prosperous career before him, he had been compelled (at only thirty-one years of age) to ask a colleague to take charge of his practice, and to give the brain which he had cruelly wearied a rest of some months to come. On the next day he had arranged to embark for the Mediterranean in a friend’s yacht.

An active man, devoted heart and soul to his profession, is not a man who can learn the happy knack of being idle at a moment’s notice. Ovid found the mere act of looking out of window, and wondering what he should do next, more than he had patience to endure.

He turned to his study table. If he had possessed a wife to look after him, he would have been reminded that he and his study table had nothing in common, under present circumstances. Being deprived of conjugal superintendence, he broke though his own rules. His restless hand unlocked a drawer, and took out a manuscript work on medicine of his own writing. “Surely,” he thought, “I may finish a chapter, before I go to sea to-morrow?”

His head, steady enough while he was only looking out of window, began to swim before he had got to the bottom of a page. The last sentences of the unfinished chapter alluded to a matter of fact which he had not yet verified. In emergencies of any sort, he was a patient man and a man of resource. The necessary verification could be accomplished by a visit to the College of Surgeons, situated in the great square called Lincoln’s Inn Fields. Here was a motive for a walk—with an occupation at the end of it, which only involved a question to a Curator, and an examination of a Specimen. He locked up his manuscript, and set forth for Lincoln’s Inn Fields.

CHAPTER II.

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When two friends happen to meet in the street, do they ever look back along the procession of small circumstances which has led them both, from the starting-point of their own houses, to the same spot, at the same time? Not one man in ten thousand has probably ever thought of making such a fantastic inquiry as this. And consequently not one man in ten thousand, living in the midst of reality, has discovered that he is also living in the midst of romance.

From the moment when the young surgeon closed the door of his house, he was walking blindfold on his way to a patient in the future who was personally still a stranger to him. He never reached the College of Surgeons. He never embarked on his friend’s yacht.

What were the obstacles which turned him aside from the course that he had in view? Nothing but a series of trivial circumstances, occurring in the experience of a man who goes out for a walk.

He had only reached the next street, when the first of the circumstances presented itself in the shape of a friend’s carriage, which drew up at his side. A bright benevolent face encircled by bushy white whiskers, looked out of the window, and a hearty voice asked him if he had completed his arrangements for a long holiday. Having replied to this, Ovid had a question to put, on his side.

“How is our patient, Sir Richard?”

“Out of danger.”

“And what do the other doctors say now?”

Sir Richard laughed: “They say it’s my luck.”

“Not convinced yet?”

“Not in the least. Who has ever succeeded in convincing fools? Let’s try another subject. Is your mother reconciled to your new plans?”

“I can hardly tell you. My mother is in a state of indescribable agitation. Her brother’s Will has been found in Italy. And his daughter may arrive in England at a moment’s notice.”

“Unmarried?” Sir Richard asked slyly.

“I don’t know.”

“Any money?”

Ovid smiled—not cheerfully. “Do you think my poor mother would be in a state of indescribable agitation if there was *not* money?”

Sir Richard was one of those obsolete elderly persons who quote Shakespeare. “Ah, well,” he said, “your mother is like Kent in King Lear—she’s too old to learn. Is she as fond as ever of lace? and as keen as ever after a bargain?” He handed a card out of the carriage window. “I have just seen an old patient of mine,” he resumed, “in whom I feel a friendly interest. She is retiring from business by my advice; and she asks me, of all the people in the world, to help her in getting rid of some wonderful ‘remnants,’ at ‘an alarming sacrifice!’ My kind regards to your mother—and there’s a chance for her. One last word, Ovid. Don’t be in too great a hurry to return to work; you have plenty of spare time before you. Look at my wise dog here, on the front seat, and learn from him to be idle and happy.”

The great physician had another companion, besides his dog. A friend, bound his way, had accepted a seat in the carriage. “Who is that handsome young man?” the friend asked as they drove away.

“He is the only son of a relative of mine, dead many years since,” Sir Richard replied. “Don’t forget that you have seen him.”

“May I ask why?”

“He has not yet reached the prime of life; and he is on the way—already far on the way—to be one of the foremost men of his time. With a private fortune, he has worked as few surgeons work who have their bread to get by their profession. The money comes from his late father. His mother has married again. The second husband is a lazy, harmless old fellow, named Gallilee; possessed of one small attraction—fifty thousand pounds, grubbed up in trade. There are two little daughters, by the second marriage. With such a stepfather as I have described, and, between ourselves, with a mother who has rather more than her fair share of the jealous, envious, and money-loving propensities of humanity, my friend Ovid is not diverted by family influences from the close pursuit of his profession. You will tell me, he may marry. Well! if he gets a good wife she will be a circumstance in his favour. But, so far as I know, he is not that sort of man. Cooler, a deal cooler, with women than I am—though I am old enough to be his father. Let us get back to his professional prospects. You heard him ask me about a patient?”

“Yes.”

“Very good. Death was knocking hard at that patient’s door, when I called Ovid into consultation with myself and with two other doctors who differed with me. It was one of the very rare cases in which the old practice of bleeding was, to my mind, the only treatment to pursue. I never told him that this was the point in dispute between me and the other men—and they said nothing, on their side, at my express request. He took his time to examine and think; and he saw the chance of saving the patient by venturing on the use of the lancet as plainly as I did—with my forty years’ experience to teach me! A young man with that capacity for discovering the remote cause of disease, and with that superiority to the trammels of routine in applying the treatment, has no common medical career before him. His holiday will set his health right in next to no time. I see nothing in his way, at present—not even a woman! But,” said Sir Richard, with the explanatory wink of one eye peculiar (like quotation from Shakespeare) to persons of the obsolete old time, *“we* know better than to forecast the weather if a petticoat influence appears on the horizon. One prediction, however, I do risk. If his mother buys any of that lace—I know who will get the best of the bargain!”

The conditions under which the old doctor was willing to assume the character of a prophet never occurred. Ovid remembered that he was going away on a long voyage—and Ovid was a good son. He bought some of the lace, as a present to his mother at parting; and, most assuredly, he got the worst of the bargain.

His shortest way back to the straight course, from which he had deviated in making his purchase, led him into a by-

street, near the flower and fruit market of Covent Garden. Here he met with the second in number of the circumstances which attended his walk. He found himself encountered by an intolerably filthy smell.

The market was not out of the direct way to Lincoln’s Inn Fields. He fled from the smell to the flowery and fruity perfumes of Covent Garden, and completed the disinfecting process by means of a basket of strawberries.

Why did a poor ragged little girl, carrying a big baby, look with such longing eyes at the delicious fruit, that, as a kind-hearted man, he had no alternative but to make her a present of the strawberries? Why did two dirty boyfriends of hers appear immediately afterwards with news of Punch in a neighbouring street, and lead the little girl away with them? Why did these two new circumstances inspire him with a fear that the boys might take the strawberries away from the poor child, burdened as she was with a baby almost as big as herself? When we suffer from overwrought nerves we are easily disturbed by small misgivings. The idle man of wearied mind followed the friends of the street drama to see what happened, forgetful of the College of Surgeons, and finding a new fund of amusement in himself.

Arrived in the neighbouring street, he discovered that the Punch performance had come to an end—like some other dramatic performances of higher pretensions—for want of a paying audience. He waited at a certain distance, watching the children. His doubts had done them an injustice. The boys only said, “Give us a taste.” And the liberal little girl rewarded their good conduct. An equitable and friendly division of the strawberries was made in a quiet corner.

Where—always excepting the case of a miser or a millionaire—is the man to be found who could have returned to the pursuit of his own affairs, under these circumstances, without encouraging the practice of the social virtues by a present of a few pennies? Ovid was not that man.

Putting back in his breast-pocket the bag in which he was accustomed to carry small coins for small charities, his hand touched something which felt like the envelope of a letter. He took it out—looked at it with an expression of annoyance and surprise—and once more turned aside from the direct way to Lincoln’s Inn Fields.

The envelope contained his last prescription. Having occasion to consult the “Pharmacopoeia,” he had written it at home, and had promised to send it to the patient immediately. In the absorbing interest of making his preparations for leaving England, it had remained forgotten in his pocket for nearly two days. The one means of setting this unlucky error right, without further delay, was to deliver his prescription himself, and to break through his own rules for the second time by attending to a case of illness—purely as an act of atonement.

The patient lived in a house nearly opposite to the British Museum. In this northward direction he now set his face.

He made his apologies, and gave his advice—and, getting out again into the street, tried once more to shape his course for the College of Surgeons. Passing the walled garden of the British Museum, he looked towards it—and paused. What had stopped him, this time? Nothing but a tree, fluttering its bright leaves in the faint summer air.

A marked change showed itself in his face.

The moment before he had been passing in review the curious little interruptions which had attended his walk, and had wondered humorously what would happen next. Two women, meeting him, and seeing a smile on his lips, had said to each other, “There goes a happy man.” If they had encountered him now, they might have reversed their opinion. They would have seen a man thinking of something once dear to him, in the far and unforgotten past.

He crossed over the road to the side-street which faced the garden. His head drooped; he moved mechanically. Arrived in the street, he lifted his eyes, and stood (within nearer view of it) looking at the tree.

Hundreds of miles away from London, under another tree of that gentle family, this man—so cold to women in after life—had made child-love, in the days of his boyhood, to a sweet little cousin long since numbered with the dead. The present time, with its interests and anxieties, passed away like the passing of a dream. Little by little, as the minutes followed each other, his sore heart felt a calming influence, breathed mysteriously from the fluttering leaves. Still forgetful of the outward world, he wandered slowly up the street; living in the old scenes; thinking, not unhappily now, the old thoughts.

Where, in all London, could he have found a solitude more congenial to a dreamer in daylight?

The broad district, stretching northward and eastward from the British Museum, is like the quiet quarter of a country town set in the midst of the roaring activities of the largest city in the world. Here, you can cross the road, without putting limb or life in peril. Here, when you are idle,

you can saunter and look about, safe from collision with merciless straight-walkers whose time is money, and whose destiny is business. Here, you may meet undisturbed cats on the pavement, in the full glare of noontide, and may watch, through the railings of the squares, children at play on grass that almost glows with the lustre of the Sussex Downs. This haven of rest is alike out of the way of fashion and business; and is yet within easy reach of the one and the other. Ovid paused in a vast and silent square. If his little cousin had lived, he might perhaps have seen his children at play in some such secluded place as this.

The birds were singing blithely in the trees. A tradesman’s boy, delivering fish to the cook, and two girls watering flowers at a window, were the only living creatures near him, as he roused himself and looked around.

Where was the College? Where were the Curator and the Specimen? Those questions brought with them no feeling of anxiety or surprise. He turned, in a half-awakened way, without a wish or a purpose—turned, and listlessly looked back.

Two foot-passengers, dressed in mourning garments, were rapidly approaching him. One of them, as they came nearer, proved to be an aged woman. The other was a girl.

He drew aside to let them pass. They looked at him with the lukewarm curiosity of strangers, as they went by. The girl’s eyes and his met. Only the glance of an instant—and its influence held him for life.

She went swiftly on, as little impressed by the chance meeting as the old woman at her side. Without stopping to think—without being capable of thought—Ovid followed

them. Never before had he done what he was doing now; he was, literally, out of himself. He saw them ahead of him, and he saw nothing else.

Towards the middle of the square, they turned aside into a street on the left. A concert-hall was in the street—with doors open for an afternoon performance. They entered the hall. Still out of himself, Ovid followed them.

CHAPTER III.

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A room of magnificent size; furnished with every conventional luxury that money can buy; lavishly provided with newspapers and books of reference; lighted by tall windows in the day-time, and by gorgeous chandeliers at night, may be nevertheless one of the dreariest places of rest and shelter that can be found on the civilised earth. Such places exist, by hundreds, in those hotels of monstrous proportions and pretensions, which now engulf the traveller who ends his journey on the pier or the platform. It may be that we feel ourselves to be strangers among strangers—it may be that there is something innately repellent in splendid carpets and curtains, chairs and tables, which have no social associations to recommend them—it may be that the mind loses its elasticity under the inevitable restraint on friendly communication, which expresses itself in lowered tones and instinctive distrust of our next neighbour; but this alone is certain: life, in the public drawing-room of a great hotel, is life with all its healthiest emanations perishing in an exhausted receiver.

On the same day, and nearly at the same hour, when Ovid had left his house, two women sat in a corner of the public room, in one of the largest of the railway hotels latterly built in London.

Without observing it themselves, they were objects of curiosity to their fellow-travellers. They spoke to each other in a foreign language. They were dressed in deep mourning—with an absence of fashion and a simplicity of material

which attracted the notice of every other woman in the room. One of them wore a black veil over her gray hair. Her hands were brown, and knotty at the joints; her eyes looked unnaturally bright for her age; innumerable wrinkles crossed and re-crossed her skinny face; and her aquiline nose (as one of the ladies present took occasion to remark) was so disastrously like the nose of the great Duke of Wellington as to be an offensive feature in the face of a woman.

The lady's companion, being a man, took a more merciful view. "She can't help being ugly," he whispered. "But see how she looks at the girl with her. A good old creature, I say, if ever there was one yet." The lady eyed him, as only a jealous woman can eye her husband, and whispered back, "Of course you're in love with that slip of a girl!"

She *was* a slip of a girl—and not even a tall slip. At seventeen years of age, it was doubtful whether she would ever grow to a better height.

But a girl who is too thin, and not even so tall as the Venus de' Medici, may still be possessed of personal attractions. It was not altogether a matter of certainty, in this case, that the attractions were sufficiently remarkable to excite general admiration. The fine colour and the plump healthy cheeks, the broad smile, and the regular teeth, the well-developed mouth, and the promising bosom which form altogether the average type of beauty found in the purely bred English maiden, were not among the noticeable charms of the small creature in gloomy black, shrinking into a corner of the big room. She had very little colour of any sort to boast of. Her hair was of so light a brown that it just escaped being flaxen; but it had the negative merit of not

being forced down to her eyebrows, and twisted into the hideous curly-wig which exhibits a liberal equality of ugliness on the heads of women in the present day. There was a delicacy of finish in her features—in the nose and the lips especially—a sensitive changefulness in the expression of her eyes (too dark in themselves to be quite in harmony with her light hair), and a subtle yet simple witchery in her rare smile, which atoned, in some degree at least, for want of complexion in the face and of flesh in the figure. Men might dispute her claims to beauty—but no one could deny that she was, in the common phrase, an interesting person. Grace and refinement; a quickness of apprehension and a vivacity of movement, suggestive of some foreign origin; a childish readiness of wonder, in the presence of new objects—and perhaps, under happier circumstances, a childish playfulness with persons whom she loved—were all characteristic attractions of the modest stranger who was in the charge of the ugly old woman, and who was palpably the object of that wrinkled duenna's devoted love.

A travelling writing-case stood open on a table near them. In an interval of silence the girl looked at it reluctantly. They had been talking of family affairs—and had spoken in Italian, so as to keep their domestic secrets from the ears of the strangers about them. The old woman was the first to resume the conversation.

"My Carmina, you really ought to write that letter," she said; "the illustrious Mrs. Gallilee is waiting to hear of our arrival in London."

Carmina took up the pen, and put it down again with a sigh. "We only arrived last night," she pleaded. "Dear old

Teresa, let us have one day in London by ourselves!”

Teresa received this proposal with undisguised amazement and alarm,

“Jesu Maria! a day in London—and your aunt waiting for you all the time! She is your second mother, my dear, by appointment; and her house is your new home. And you propose to stop a whole day at an hotel, instead of going home. Impossible! Write, my Carmina—write. See, here is the address on a card:—‘Fairfield Gardens.’ What a pretty place it must be to live in, with such a name as that! And a sweet lady, no doubt. Come! Come!”

But Carmina still resisted. “I have never even seen my aunt,” she said. “It is dreadful to pass my life with a stranger. Remember, I was only a child when you came to us after my mother’s death. It is hardly six months yet since I lost my father. I have no one but you, and, when I go to this new home, you will leave me. I only ask for one more day to be together, before we part.”

The poor old duenna drew back out of sight, in the shadow of a curtain—and began to cry. Carmina took her hand, under cover of a tablecloth; Carmina knew how to console her. “We will go and see sights,” she whispered “and, when dinner-time comes, you shall have a glass of the Porto-porto-wine.”

Teresa looked round out of the shadow, as easily comforted as a child. “Sights!” she exclaimed—and dried her tears. “Porto-porto-wine!” she repeated—and smacked her withered lips at the relishing words. “Ah, my child, you have not forgotten the consolations I told you of, when I lived in London in my young days. To think of you, with an

English father, and never in London till now! I used to go to museums and concerts sometimes, when my English mistress was pleased with me. That gracious lady often gave me a glass of the fine strong purple wine. The Holy Virgin grant that Aunt Gallilee may be as kind a woman! Such a head of hair as the other one she cannot hope to have. It was a joy to dress it. Do you think I wouldn't stay here in England with you if I could? What is to become of my old man in Italy, with his cursed asthma, and nobody to nurse him? Oh, but those were dull years in London! The black endless streets—the dreadful Sundays—the hundreds of thousands of people, always in a hurry; always with grim faces set on business, business, business! I was glad to go back and be married in Italy. And here I am in London again, after God knows how many years. No matter. We will enjoy ourselves to-day; and when we go to Madam Gallilee's to-morrow, we will tell a little lie, and say we only arrived on the evening that has not yet come."

The duenna's sense of humour was so tickled by this prospective view of the little lie, that she leaned back in her chair and laughed. Carmina's rare smile showed itself faintly. The terrible first interview with the unknown aunt still oppressed her. She took up a newspaper in despair. "Oh, my old dear!" she said, "let us get out of this dreadful room, and be reminded of Italy!" Teresa lifted her ugly hands in bewilderment. "Reminded of Italy—in London?"

"Is there no Italian music in London?" Carmina asked suggestively.

The duenna's bright eyes answered this in their own language. She snatched up the nearest newspaper.

It was then the height of the London concert season. Morning performances of music were announced in rows. Reading the advertised programmes, Carmina found them, in one remarkable respect, all alike. They would have led an ignorant stranger to wonder whether any such persons as Italian composers, French composers, and English composers had ever existed. The music offered to the English public was music of exclusively German (and for the most part modern German) origin. Carmina held the opinion —in common with Mozart and Rossini, as well as other people—that music without melody is not music at all. She laid aside the newspaper.

The plan of going to a concert being thus abandoned, the idea occurred to them of seeing pictures. Teresa, in search of information, tried her luck at a great table in the middle of the room, on which useful books were liberally displayed. She returned with a catalogue of the Royal Academy Exhibition (which someone had left on the table), and with the most universally well-informed book, on a small scale, that has ever enlightened humanity—modestly described on the title-page as an Almanac.

Carmina opened the catalogue at the first page, and discovered a list of Royal Academicians. Were all these gentlemen celebrated painters? Out of nearly forty names, three only had made themselves generally known beyond the limits of England. She turned to the last page. The works of art on show numbered more than fifteen hundred. Teresa, looking over her shoulder, made the same discovery. “Our heads will ache, and our feet will ache,” she remarked,

“before we get out of that place.” Carmina laid aside the catalogue.

Teresa opened the Almanac at hazard, and hit on the page devoted to Amusements. Her next discovery led her to the section inscribed “Museums.” She scored an approving mark at that place with her thumbnail—and read the list in fluent broken English.

The British Museum? Teresa’s memory of that magnificent building recalled it vividly in one respect. She shook her head. “More headache and footache, there!” Bethnal Green; Indian Museum; College of Surgeons; Practical Geology; South Kensington; Patent Museum—all unknown to Teresa. “The saints preserve us! what headaches and footaches in all these, if they are as big as that other one!” She went on with the list—and astonished everybody in the room by suddenly clapping her hands. Sir John Soane’s Museum, Lincoln’s Inn Fields. “Ah, but I remember that! A nice little easy museum in a private house, and all sorts of pretty things to see. My dear love, trust your old Teresa. Come to Soane!”

In ten minutes more they were dressed, and on the steps of the hotel. The bright sunlight, the pleasant air, invited them to walk. On the same afternoon, when Ovid had set forth on foot for Lincoln’s Inn Fields, Carmina and Teresa set forth on foot for Lincoln’s Inn Fields. Trivial obstacles had kept the man away from the College. Would trivial obstacles keep the women away from the Museum?

They crossed the Strand, and entered a street which led out of it towards the North; Teresa’s pride in her memory forbidding her thus far to ask their way.

Their talk—dwelling at first on Italy, and on the memory of Carmina's Italian mother—reverted to the formidable subject of Mrs. Gallilee. Teresa's hopeful view of the future turned to the cousins, and drew the picture of two charming little girls, eagerly waiting to give their innocent hearts to their young relative from Italy. "Are there only two?" she said. "Surely you told me there was a boy, besides the girls?" Carmina set her right. "My cousin Ovid is a great doctor," she continued with an air of importance. "Poor papa used to say that our family would have reason to be proud of him." "Does he live at home?" asked simple Teresa. "Oh, dear, no! He has a grand house of his own. Hundreds of sick people go there to be cured, and give hundreds of golden guineas." Hundreds of golden guineas gained by only curing sick people, represented to Teresa's mind something in the nature of a miracle: she solemnly raised her eyes to heaven. "What a cousin to have! Is he young? is he handsome? is he married?"

Instead of answering these questions, Carmina looked over her shoulder. "Is this poor creature following us?" she asked.

They had now turned to the right, and had entered a busy street leading directly to Covent Garden. The "creature" (who was undoubtedly following them) was one of the starved and vagabond dogs of London. Every now and then, the sympathies of their race lead these inveterate wanderers to attach themselves, for the time, to some human companion, whom their mysterious insight chooses from the crowd. Teresa, with the hard feeling towards animals which is one of the serious defects of the Italian

character, cried, “Ah, the mangy beast!” and lifted her umbrella. The dog starred back, waited a moment, and followed them again as they went on.

Carmina’s gentle heart gave its pity to this lost and hungry fellow-creature. “I must buy that poor dog something to eat,” she said—and stopped suddenly as the idea struck her.

The dog, accustomed to kicks and curses, was ignorant of kindness. Following close behind her, when she checked herself, he darted away in terror into the road. A cab was driven by rapidly at the same moment. The wheel passed over the dog’s neck. And there was an end, as a man remarked looking on, of the troubles of a cur.

This common accident struck the girl’s sensitive nature with horror. Helpless and speechless, she trembled piteously. The nearest open door was the door of a music-seller’s shop. Teresa led her in, and asked for a chair and a glass of water. The proprietor, feeling the interest in Carmina which she seldom failed to inspire among strangers, went the length of offering her a glass of wine. Preferring water, she soon recovered herself sufficiently to be able to leave her chair.

“May I change my mind about going to the museum?” she said to her companion. “After what has happened, I hardly feel equal to looking at curiosities.”

Teresa’s ready sympathy tried to find some acceptable alternative. “Music would be better, wouldn’t it?” she suggested.

The so-called Italian Opera was open that night, and the printed announcement of the performance was in the shop.

They both looked at it. Fortune was still against them. A German opera appeared on the bill. Carmina turned to the music-seller in despair. “Is there no music, sir, but German music to be heard in London?” she asked. The hospitable shopkeeper produced a concert programmed for that afternoon—the modest enterprise of an obscure piano-forte teacher, who could only venture to address pupils, patrons, and friends. What did he promise? Among other things, music from “Lucia,” music from “Norma,” music from “Ernani.” Teresa made another approving mark with her thumb-nail; and Carmina purchased tickets.

The music-seller hurried to the door to stop the first empty cab that might pass. Carmina showed a deplorable ignorance of the law of chances. She shrank from the bare idea of getting into a cab. “We may run over some other poor creature,” she said. “If it isn’t a dog, it may be a child next time.” Teresa and the music-seller suggested a more reasonable view as gravely as they could. Carmina humbly submitted to the claims of common sense—without yielding, for all that. “I know I’m wrong,” she confessed. “Don’t spoil my pleasure; I can’t do it!”

The strange parallel was now complete. Bound for the same destination, Carmina and Ovid had failed to reach it alike. And Carmina had stopped to look at the garden of the British Museum, before she overtook Ovid in the quiet square.

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If, on entering the hall, Ovid had noticed the placards, he would have found himself confronted by a coincidence. The person who gave the concert was also the person who taught music to his half-sisters. Not many days since, he had himself assisted the enterprise, by taking a ticket at his mother’s request. Seeing nothing, remembering nothing—hurried by the fear of losing sight of the two strangers if there was a large audience—he impatiently paid for another ticket, at the doors.

The room was little more than half full, and so insufficiently ventilated that the atmosphere was oppressive even under those circumstances. He easily discovered the two central chairs, in the midway row of seats, which she and her companion had chosen. There was a vacant chair (among many others) at one extremity of the row in front of them. He took that place. To look at her, without being discovered—there, so far, was the beginning and the end of his utmost desire.

The performances had already begun. So long as her attention was directed to the singers and players on the platform, he could feast his eyes on her with impunity. In an unoccupied interval, she looked at the audience—and discovered him.

Had he offended her?

If appearances were to be trusted, he had produced no impression of any sort. She quietly looked away, towards the other side of the room. The mere turning of her head was misinterpreted by Ovid as an implied rebuke. He moved to the row of seats behind her. She was now nearer to him than she had been yet. He was again content, and more than content. The next performance was a solo on the piano. A round of applause welcomed the player. Ovid looked at the platform for the first time. In the bowing man, with a prematurely bald head and a servile smile, he recognized Mrs. Gallilee's music-master. The inevitable inference followed. His mother might be in the room.

After careful examination of the scanty audience, he failed to discover her—thus far. She would certainly arrive, nevertheless. My money's worth for my money was a leading principle in Mrs. Gallilee's life.

He sighed as he looked towards the door of entrance. Not for long had he revelled in the luxury of a new happiness. He had openly avowed his dislike of concerts, when his mother had made him take a ticket for this concert. With her quickness of apprehension what might she not suspect, if she found him among the audience?

Come what might of it, he still kept his place; he still feasted his eyes on the slim figure of the young girl, on the gentle yet spirited carriage of her head. But the pleasure was no longer pleasure without alloy. His mother had got between them now.

The solo on the piano came to an end.

In the interval that followed, he turned once more towards the entrance. Just as he was looking away again, he heard Mrs. Gallilee's loud voice. She was administering a maternal caution to one of the children. "Behave better here than you behaved in the carriage, or I shall take you away."

If she found him in his present place—if she put her own clever construction on what she saw—her opinion would assuredly express itself in some way. She was one of those women who can insult another woman (and safely disguise it) by an inquiring look. For the girl's sake, Ovid instantly moved away from her to the seats at the back of the hall.

Mrs. Gallilee made a striking entrance—dressed to perfection; powdered and painted to perfection; leading her daughters, and followed by her governess. The usher courteously indicated places near the platform. Mrs. Galilee astonished him by a little lecture on acoustics, delivered with the sweetest condescension. Her Christian humility smiled, and call the usher, Sir. "Sound, sir, is most perfectly heard towards the centre of the auditorium." She led the way towards the centre. Vacant places invited her to the row of seats occupied by Carmina and Teresa. She, the unknown aunt, seated herself next to the unknown niece.

They looked at each other.

Perhaps, it was the heat of the room. Perhaps, she had not perfectly recovered the nervous shock of seeing the dog killed. Carmina's head sank on good Teresa's shoulder. She had fainted.

CHAPTER V.

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“May I ask for a cup of tea, Miss Minerva?”

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“Delighted, I’m sure, Mr. Le Frank.”

“And was Mrs. Gallilee pleased with the Concert?”

“Charmed.”

Mr. Le Frank shook his head. “I am afraid there was a drawback,” he suggested. “You forget the lady who fainted. So alarming to the audience. So disagreeable to the artists.”

“Take care, Mr. Le Frank! These new houses are flimsily built; they might hear you upstairs. The fainting lady is upstairs. All the elements of a romance are upstairs. Is your tea to your liking?”

In this playfully provocative manner, Miss Minerva (the governess) trifled with the curiosity of Mr. Le Frank (the music-master), as the proverbial cat trifles with the terror of the captive mouse. The man of the bald head and the servile smile showed a polite interest in the coming disclosure; he opened his deeply-sunk eyes, and lazily lifted his delicate eyebrows.

He had called at Mrs. Gallilee’s house, after the concert, to get a little tea (with a large infusion of praise) in the schoolroom. A striking personal contrast confronted him, in the face of the lady who was dispensing the hospitalities of the table. Mr. Le Frank’s plump cheeks were, in colour, of the obtrusively florid sort. The relics of yellow hair, still