GEORGE GISSING

WILL WARBURTON

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CHAPTER 1

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The sea-wind in his hair, his eyes agleam with the fresh memory of Alpine snows, Will Warburton sprang out of the cab, paid the driver a double fare, flung on to his shoulder a heavy bag and ran up, two steps at a stride, to a flat on the fourth floor of the many-tenanted building hard by Chelsea Bridge. His rat-tat-tat brought to the door a thin yellow face, cautious in espial, through the narrow opening.

"Is it you, sir?"

"All right, Mrs. Hopper! How are you?—how are you?"

He threw his bag into the passage, and cordially grasped the woman's hands.

"Dinner ready? Savagely hungry. Give me three minutes, and serve."

For about that length of time there sounded in the bedroom a splashing and a blowing; then Warburton came forth with red cheeks. He seized upon a little pile of letters and packets which lay on his writing-table, broke envelopes, rent wrappers, and read with now an ejaculation of pleasure, now a grunt of disgust, and again a mirthful half roar. Then, dinner—the feeding of a famished man of robust appetite and digestion, a man three or four years on the green side of thirty. It was a speedy business, in not much more than a quarter of an hour there disappeared a noble steak and its appurtenances, a golden-crusted apple tart, a substantial slice of ripe Cheddar, two bottles of creamy Bass.

"Now I can talk!" cried Will to his servant, as he threw himself into a deep chair, and began lighting his pipe.

"What's the news? I seem to have been away three months rather than three weeks."

"Mr. Franks called yesterday, sir, late in the afternoon, when I was here cleaning. He was very glad to hear you'd be back to-day, and said he might look in to-night."

"Good! What else?"

"My brother-in-law wishes to see you, sir. He's in trouble again—lost his place at Boxon's a few days ago. I don't exac'ly know how it happened, but he'll explain everything. He's very unfortunate, sir, is Allchin."

"Tell him to come before nine to-morrow morning, if he can."

"Yes, sir. I'm sure it's very kind of you, sir."

"What else?"

"Nothing as I can think of just now, sir."

Warburton knew from the woman's way of speaking that she had something still in her mind; but his pipe being well lit, and a pleasant lassitude creeping over him, he merely nodded. Mrs. Hopper cleared the table, and withdrew.

The window looked across the gardens of Chelsea Hospital (old-time Ranelagh) to the westward reach of the river, beyond which lay Battersea Park, with its lawns and foliage. A beam of the July sunset struck suddenly through the room. Warburton was aware of it with half-closed eyes; he wished to stir himself, and look forth, but languor held his limbs, and wreathing tobacco-smoke kept his thoughts among the mountains. He might have quite dozed off had not a sudden noise from within aroused him—the unmistakable crash of falling crockery. It made him laugh, a laugh of humorous expostulation. A minute or two passed,

then came a timid tap at his door, and Mrs. Hopper showed her face.

"Another accident, sir, I'm sorry to say," were her faltering words.

"Extensive?"

"A dish and two plates, I'm sorry to say, sir."

"Oh, that's nothing."

"Of course I shall make them good, sir."

"Pooh! Aren't there plates enough?"

"Oh, quite enough—just yet, sir."

Warburton subdued a chuckle, and looked with friendly smile at his domestic, who stood squeezing herself between the edge of the door and the jamb—her habit when embarrassed. Mrs. Hopper had served him for three years; he knew all her weaknesses, but thought more of her virtues, chief of which were honest intention and a moderate aptitude for plain cooking. A glance about this room would have proved to any visitor that Mrs. Hopper's ideas of cleanliness were by no means rigid, her master had made himself to a certain extent responsible for this defect; he paid little attention to dust, provided that things were in their wonted order. Mrs. Hopper was not a resident domestic; she came at stated hours. Obviously a widow, she had a poor, loose-hung, trailing little body, which no nourishment could plump or fortify. Her visage was habitually doleful, but contracted itself at moments into a grin of quaint drollery, which betrayed her for something of a humorist.

"My fingers is all gone silly to-day, sir," she pursued. "I daresay it's because I haven't had much sleep these last

few nights."

"How's that?"

"It's my poor sister, sir—my sister Liza, I mean—she's had one of her worst headaches—the extra special, we call 'em. This time it's lasted more than three days, and not one minute of rest has the poor thing got."

Warburton was all sympathy; he inquired about the case as though it were that of an intimate friend. Change of air and repose were obvious remedies; no less obviously, these things were out of the question for a working woman who lived on a few shillings a week.

"Do you know of any place she could go to?" asked Warburton, adding carelessly, "if the means were provided."

Mrs. Hopper squeezed herself more tightly than ever between door and jamb. Her head was bent in an abashed way, and when she spoke it was in a thick, gurgling tone, only just intelligible.

"There's a little lodging 'ouse at Southend, sir, where we used to go when my 'usband could afford it."

"Well, look here. Get a doctor's opinion whether Southend would do; if not, which place would. And just send her away. Don't worry about the money."

Experience enabled Mrs. Hopper to interpret this advice. She stammered gratitude.

"How's your other sister—Mrs. Allchin?" Warburton inquired kindly.

"Why, sir, she's doing pretty well in her 'ealth, sir, but her baby died yesterday week. I hope you'll excuse me, sir, for all this bad news just when you come back from your

holiday, and when it's natural as you don't feel in very good spirits."

Will had much ado not to laugh. On his return from a holiday, Mrs. Hopper always presumed him to be despondent in view of the resumption of daily work. He was beginning to talk of Mrs. Allchin's troubles, when at the outer door sounded a long nervous knock.

"Ha! That's Mr. Franks."

Mrs. Hopper ran to admit the visitor.

CHAPTER 2

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"Warburton!" cried a high-pitched voice from the passage. "Have you seen *The Art World*?"

And there rushed into the room a tall, auburn-headed young man of five-and-twenty, his comely face glowing in excitement. With one hand he grasped his friend's, in the other he held out a magazine.

"You haven't seen it! Look here! What d'you think of that, confound you!"

He had opened the magazine so as to display an illustration, entitled "Sanctuary," and stated to be after a painting by Norbert Franks.

"Isn't it good? Doesn't it come out well?—deuce take you, why don't you speak?"

"Not bad—for a photogravure," said Warburton, who had the air of a grave elder in the presence of this ebullient youth.

"Be hanged! We know all about that. The thing is that it's *there*. Don't you feel any surprise? Haven't you got anything to say? Don't you see what this means, you old ragamuffin?"

"Shouldn't wonder if it meant coin of the realm—for your shrewd dealer."

"For me too, my boy, for me too! Not out of this thing, of course. But I've arrived, I'm *lancé*, the way is clear! Why, you don't seem to know what it means getting into *The Art World*."

"I seem to remember," said Warburton, smiling, "that a month or two ago, you hadn't language contemptuous

enough for this magazine and all connected with it."

"Don't be an ass!" shrilled the other, who was all this time circling about the little room with much gesticulation. "Of course one talks like that when one hasn't enough to eat and can't sell a picture. I don't pretend to have altered my opinion about photogravures, and all that. But come now, the thing itself? Be honest, Warburton. Is it bad, now? Can you look at that picture, and say that it's worthless?"

"I never said anything of the kind."

"No, no! You're too deucedly good-natured. But I always detected what you were thinking, and I saw it didn't surprise you at all when the Academy muffs refused it."

"There you're wrong," cried Warburton. "I was really surprised."

"Confound your impudence! Well, you may think what you like. I maintain that the thing isn't half bad. It grows upon me. I see its merits more and more."

Franks was holding up the picture, eyeing it intently. "Sanctuary" represented the interior of an old village church. On the ground against a pillar, crouched a young and beautiful woman, her dress and general aspect indicating the last degree of vagrant wretchedness; worn out, she had fallen asleep in a most graceful attitude, and the rays of a winter sunset smote upon her pallid countenance. Before her stood the village clergyman, who had evidently just entered, and found her here; his white head was bent in the wonted attitude of clerical benevolence; in his face blended a gentle wonder and a compassionate tenderness.

"If that had been hung at Burlington House, Warburton, it would have been the picture of the year."

"I think it very likely."

"Yes, I know what you mean, you sarcastic old ruffian. But there's another point of view. Is the drawing good or not? Is the colour good or not? Of course you know nothing about it, but I tell you, for your information, I think it's a confoundedly clever bit of work. There remains the subject, and where's the harm in it? The incident's quite possible. And why shouldn't the girl be good-looking?"

"Angelic!"

"Well why not? There *are* girls with angelic faces. Don't I know one?"

Warburton, who had been sitting with a leg over the arm of his chair suddenly changed his position.

"That reminds me," he said. "I came across the Pomfrets in Switzerland."

"Where? When?"

"At Trient ten days ago. I spent three or four days with them. Hasn't Miss Elvan mentioned it?"

"I haven't heard from her for a long time," replied Franks. "Well, for more than a week. Did you meet them by chance?"

"Quite. I had a vague idea that the Pomfrets and their niece were somewhere in Switzerland."

"Vague idea!" cried the artist "Why, I told you all about it, and growled for five or six hours one evening here because I couldn't go with them."

"So you did," said Warburton, "but I'm afraid I was thinking of something else, and when I started for the Alps, I

had really forgotten all about it. I made up my mind suddenly, you know. We're having a troublesome time in Ailie Street, and it was holiday now or never. By the bye, we shall have to wind up. Sugar spells ruin. We must get out of it whilst we can do so with a whole skin."

"Ah, really?" muttered Franks. "Tell me about that presently; I want to hear of Rosamund. You saw a good deal of her, of course?"

"I walked from Chamonix over the Col de Balme—grand view of Mont Blanc there! Then down to Trient, in the valley below. And there, as I went in to dinner at the hotel, I found the three. Good old Pomfret would have me stay awhile, and I was glad of the chance of long talks with him. Queer old bird, Ralph Pomfret."

"Yes, yes, so he is," muttered the artist, absently. "But Rosamund—was she enjoying herself?"

"Very much, I think. She certainly looked very well."

"Have much talk with her?" asked Franks, as if carelessly.

"We discussed you, of course. I forget whether our conclusion was favourable or not."

The artist laughed, and strode about the room with his hands in his pockets.

"You know what?" he exclaimed, seeming to look closely at a print on the wall. "I'm going to be married before the end of the year. On that point I've made up my mind. I went yesterday to see a house at Fulham—Mrs. Cross's, by the bye, it's to let at Michaelmas, rent forty-five. All but settled that I shall take it. Risk be hanged. I'm going to make money. What an ass I was to take that fellow's first offer for 'Sanctuary'! It was low water with me, and I felt bilious. Fifty

guineas! Your fault, a good deal, you know; you made me think worse of it than it deserved. You'll see; Blackstaffe'll make a small fortune out of it; of course he has all the rights—idiot that I was! Well, it's too late to talk about that.—And I say, old man, don't take my growl too literally. I don't really mean that you were to blame. I should be an ungrateful cur if I thought such a thing."

"How's 'The Slummer' getting on?" asked Warburton good-humouredly.

"Well, I was going to say that I shall have it finished in a few weeks. If Blackstaffe wants 'The Slummer' he'll have to pay for it. Of course it must go to the Academy, and of course I shall keep all the rights—unless Blackstaffe makes a really handsome offer. Why, it ought to be worth five or six hundred to me at least. And that would start us. But I don't care even if I only get half that, I shall be married all the same. Rosamund has plenty of pluck. I couldn't ask her to start life on a pound a week—about my average for the last two years; but with two or three hundred in hand, and a decent little house, like that of Mrs. Cross's, at a reasonable rent—well, we shall risk it. I'm sick of waiting. And it isn't fair to a girl—that's my view. Two years now; an engagement that lasts more than two years isn't likely to come to much good. You'll think my behaviour pretty cool, on one point. I don't forget, you old usurer, that I owe you something more than a hundred pounds—"

"Pooh!"

"Be poohed yourself! But for you, I should have gone without dinner many a day; but for you, I should most likely have had to chuck painting altogether, and turn clerk or

dock-labourer. But let me stay in your debt a little longer, old man. I can't put off my marriage any longer, and just at first I shall want all the money I can lay my hands on."

At this moment Mrs. Hopper entered with a lamp. There was a pause in the conversation. Franks lit a cigarette, and tried to sit still, but was very soon pacing the floor again. A tumbler of whisky and soda reanimated his flagging talk.

"No!" he exclaimed. "I'm not going to admit that 'Sanctuary' is cheap and sentimental, and all the rest of it. The more I think about it, the more convinced I am that it's nothing to be ashamed of. People have got hold of the idea that if a thing is popular it must be bad art. That's all rot. I'm going in for popularity. Look here! Suppose that's what I was meant for? What if it's the best I have in me to do? Shouldn't I be a jackass if I scorned to make money by what, for me, was good work, and preferred to starve whilst I turned out pretentious stuff that was worth nothing from my point of view?"

"I shouldn't wonder if you're right," said Warburton reflectively. "In any case, I know as much about art as I do about the differential calculus. To make money is a good and joyful thing as long as one doesn't bleed the poor. So go ahead, my son, and luck be with you!"

"I can't find my model yet for the Slummer's head. It mustn't be too like the 'Sanctuary' girl, but at the same time it must be a popular type of beauty. I've been haunting refreshment bars and florists' shops; lots of good material, but never *quite* the thing. There's a damsel at the Crystal Palace—but this doesn't interest you, you old misogynist."

"Old what?" exclaimed Warburton, with an air of genuine surprise.

"Have I got the word wrong? I'm not much of a classic—"

"The word's all right. But that's your idea of me, is it?"

The artist stood and gazed at his friend with an odd expression, as if a joke had been arrested on his lips by graver thought.

"Isn't it true?"

"Perhaps it is; yes, yes, I daresay."

And he turned at once to another subject.

CHAPTER 3

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The year was 1886.

When at business, Warburton sat in a high, bare room, which looked upon little Ailie Street, in Whitechapel; the air he breathed had a taste and odour strongly saccharine. If his eye strayed to one of the walls, he saw a map of the West Indies; if to another, it fell upon a map of St. Kitts; if to the third, there was before him a plan of a sugar estate on that little island. Here he sat for certain hours of the solid day, issuing orders to clerks, receiving commercial callers, studying trade journals in sundry languages—often reading some book which had no obvious reference to the sugar-refining industry. It was not Will's ideal of life, but hither he had suffered himself to be led by circumstance, and his musings suggested no practicable issue into a more congenial world.

The death of his father when he was sixteen had left him with a certain liberty for shaping a career. What he saw definitely before him was a small share in the St. Kitts property of Messrs. Sherwood Brothers, a small share in the London business of the same firm, and a small sum of ready money—these things to be his when he attained his majority. His mother and sister, who lived in a little country house down in Huntingdonshire, were modestly but securely provided for, and Will might have gone quietly on with his studies till he could resolve upon a course in life. But no sooner was he freed from paternal restraint than the lad grew restive; nothing would please him but an adventure in

foreign lands; and when it became clear that he was only wasting his time at school, Mrs. Warburton let him go to the West Indies, where a place was found for him in the house of Sherwood Brothers. At St. Kitts, Will remained till he was one-and-twenty. Long before that, he had grown heartily tired of his work, disgusted with the climate, and oppressed with home sickness, but pride forbade him to return until he could do so as a free man.

One thing this apprenticeship to life had taught him—that he was not made for subordination. "I don't care how poor I am," thus he wrote to his mother, "but I will be my own master. To be at other people's orders brings out all the bad in me; it makes me sullen and bearish, and all sorts of ugly things, which I certainly am not when my true self has play. So, you see, I must find some independent way of life. If I had to live by carrying round a Punch and Judy show, I should vastly prefer it to making a large income as somebody's servant."

Meanwhile, unfortunately for a young man of this temperament, his prospects had become less assured. There was perturbation in the sugar world; income from St. Kitts and from Whitechapel had sensibly diminished, and it seemed but too likely, would continue to do so. For some half-year Will lived in London, "looking about him," then he announced that Godfrey Sherwood, at present sole representative of Sherwood Brothers, had offered him an active partnership in Little Ailie Street, and that he had accepted it. He entered upon this position without zeal, but six months' investigation had taught him that to earn money without surrendering his independence was no very

easy thing; he probably might wait a long time before an opening would present itself more attractive than this at the sugar-refinery.

Godfrey Sherwood was a schoolfellow of his, but some two or three years older; much good feeling existed between them, their tastes and tempers having just that difference in similarity which is the surest bond of friendship. Judged by his talk, Sherwood was all vigour, energy, fire; his personal habits, on the other hand, inclined to tranquillity and ease—a great reader, he loved the literature of romance and adventure, knew by heart authors such as Malory and Froissart, had on his shelves all the books of travel and adventure he could procure. As a boy he seemed destined to any life save that of humdrum commerce, of which he spoke with contempt and abhorrence; and there was no reason why he should not have gratified his desire of seeing the world, of leading what he called "the life of a man." Yet here he was, sitting each day in a counting-house in Whitechapel, with nothing behind him but a few rambles on the continent, and certainly with no immediate intention of going far afield. His father's death left him in sole command of the business, and his reasonable course would have been to retire from it as soon as possible, for foreign competition was making itself felt in the English trade, and many firms more solidly established than that in Little Ailie Street had either come to grief or withdrawn from the struggle. But Godfrey's inertia kept him in the familiar routine, with day-to-day postponement of practical decision. When Warburton came back from St. Kitts, and their friendship was renewed, Godfrey's talk gave

full play to his imaginative energies. Yes, yes, the refining business was at a bad pass just now, but this was only temporary; those firms that could weather the storm for a year or two longer would enter upon a time of brilliant prosperity. Was it to be supposed that the Government would allow a great industry to perish out of mere regard for the fetish of Free Trade? City men with first-hand information declared that "measures" were being prepared; in one way or another, the English trade would be rescued and made triumphant over those bounty-fed foreigners.

"Hold on?" cried Sherwood. "Of course I mean to hold on. There's pleasure and honour in the thing. I enjoy the fight. I've had thoughts of getting into Parliament, to speak for sugar. One might do worse, you know. There'll be a dissolution next year, certain. First-rate fun, fighting a constituency. But in that case I must have a partner here—why that's an idea. How would it suit you? Why not join me?"

And so the thing came about. The terms which Godfrey offered were so generous that Will had to reduce them before he accepted: even thus, he found his income, at a stroke, all but doubled. Sherwood, to be sure, did not stand for Parliament, nor was anything definite heard about that sugar-protecting budget which he still believed in. In Little Ailie Street business steadily declined.

"It's a disgrace to England!" cried Godfrey. "Monstrous that not a finger should be lifted to save one of our most important industries. You, of course, are free to retire at any moment, Will. For my own part, here I stand, come what may. If it's ruin, ruin let it be. I'll fight to the last. A man

owes me ten thousand pounds. When I recover it, and I may any day—I shall put every penny into the business."

"Ten thousand pounds!" exclaimed Warburton in astonishment. "A trade debt, do you mean?"

"No, no. A friend of mine, son of a millionaire, who got into difficulties some time ago, and borrowed of me to clear himself. Good interest, and principal safe as Consols. In a year at most I shall have the money back, and every penny shall go into the business."

Will had his private view of the matter, and not seldom suffered a good deal of uneasiness as he saw the inevitable doom approach. But already it was too late to withdraw his share from the concern; that would have been merely to take advantage of Sherwood's generosity, and Will was himself not less chivalrous. In Godfrey's phrase, they continued "to fight the ship," and perhaps would have held out to the moment of sinking, had not the accession of the Liberals to power in the spring of this present year caused Sherwood so deep a disgust that he turned despondent and began to talk of surrender to hopeless circumstance.

"It's all up with us, Will. This Government spells ruin, and will count it one of its chief glories if we come to grief. But, by Heaven, they shan't have that joy. We'll square up, quietly, comfortably, with dignity. We'll come out of this fight with arms and baggage. It's still possible, you know. We'll sell the St. Kitts estate to the Germans. We'll find some one to buy us up here—the place would suit a brewer. And then—by Jove! we'll make jam."

"Jam?"

"Isn't it an idea? Cheap sugar has done for the refiners, but it's a fortune for the jam trade. Why not put all we can realize into a jam factory? We'll go down into the country; find some delightful place where land is cheap; start a fruit farm; run up a building. Doesn't it take you, Will? Think of going to business every day through lanes overhung with fruit-tree blossoms! Better that than the filth and stench and gloom and uproar of Whitechapel—what? We might found a village for our workpeople—the ideal village, perfectly healthy, every cottage beautiful. Eh? What? How does it strike you, Will?"

"Pleasant. But the money?"

"We shall have enough to start; I think we shall. If not, we'll find a moneyed man to join us."

"What about that ten thousand pounds?" suggested Warburton.

Sherwood shook his head.

"Can't get it just yet. To tell you the truth, it depends on the death of the man's father. No, but if necessary, some one will easily be found. Isn't the idea magnificent? How it would rile the Government if they heard of it! Ho, ho!"

One could never be sure how far Godfrey was serious when he talked like this; the humorous impulse so blended with the excitability of his imagination, that people who knew him little and heard him talking at large thought him something of a crack-brain. The odd thing was that, with all his peculiarities, he had many of the characteristics of a sound man of business; indeed, had it been otherwise, the balance-sheets of the refinery must long ago have shown a disastrous deficit. As Warburton knew, things had been

managed with no little prudence and sagacity; what he did not so clearly understand was that Sherwood had simply adhered to the traditions of the firm, following very exactly the path marked out for him by his father and his uncle, both notable traders. Concerning Godfrey's private resources, Warburton knew little or nothing; it seemed probable that the elder Sherwood had left a considerable fortune, which his only son must have inherited. No doubt, said Will to himself, this large reserve was the explanation of his partner's courage.

So the St. Kitts estate was sold, and, with all the deliberate dignity demanded by the fact that the Government's eye was upon them, Sherwood Brothers proceeded to terminate their affairs in Whitechapel. In July, Warburton took his three weeks' holiday, there being nothing better for him to do. And among the letters he found on his table when he returned, was one from Sherwood, which contained only these words:

"Great opportunity in view. Our fortunes are made!"

CHAPTER 4

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When Franks was gone, Warburton took up *The Art World*, which his friend had left, and glanced again at the photogravure of "Sanctuary." He knew, as he had declared, nothing about art, and judged pictures as he judged books, emotionally. His bent was to what is called the realistic point of view, and "Sanctuary" made him smile. But very good-naturedly; for he liked Norbert Franks, and believed he would do better things than this. Unless—?

The thought broke off with an uneasy interrogative.

He turned to the few lines of text devoted to the painter. Norbert Franks, he read, was still a very young man; "Sanctuary," now on exhibition at Birmingham, was his first important picture; hitherto he had been chiefly occupied with work in black and white. There followed a few critical comments, and prophecy of achievements to come.

Yes. But again the uneasy interrogative.

Their acquaintance dated from the year after Warburton's return from St. Kitts. Will had just established himself in his flat near Chelsea Bridge, delighted to be a Londoner, and was spending most of his leisure in exploration of London's vastness. He looked upon all his earlier years as wasted, because they had not been passed in the city on the Thames. The history of London, the multitudinous life of London as it lay about him, with marvels and mysteries in every highway and byway, occupied his mind, and wrought upon his imagination. Being a stout walker, and caring little for any other form of

exercise, in his free hours he covered many a league of pavement. A fine summer morning would see him set forth, long before milk-carts had begun to rattle along the streets, and on one such expedition, as he stepped briskly through a poor district south of the river, he was surprised to see an artist at work, painting seriously, his easel in the dry gutter. He slackened his pace to have a glimpse of the canvas, and the painter, a young, pleasant-looking fellow, turned round and asked if he had a match. Able to supply this demand, Warburton talked whilst the other relit his pipe. It rejoiced him, he said, to see a painter engaged upon such a subject as this—a bit of squalid London's infinite picturesqueness.

The next morning Warburton took the same walk, and again found the painter at work. They talked freely; they exchanged invitations; and that same evening Norbert Franks climbed the staircase to Will's flat, and smoked his first pipe and drank his first whisky-and-soda in the pleasant room overlooking Ranelagh. His own quarters were in Queen's Road, Battersea, at no great distance. The two young men were soon seeing a great deal of each other. When their friendship had ripened through a twelvemonth, Franks, always impecunious, cheerily borrowed a five-pound note; not long after, he mirthfully doubled his debt; and this grew to a habit with him.

"You're a capitalist, Warburton," he remarked one day, "and a generous fellow, too. Of course I shall pay what I owe you when I sell a big picture. Meanwhile, you have the gratification of supporting a man of genius, without the least inconvenience to yourself. Excellent idea of yours to strike up a friendship, wasn't it?"

The benefit was reciprocal. Warburton did not readily form intimacies; indeed Godfrey Sherwood had till now been almost the only man he called friend, and the peculiarity of his temper exposed him to the risk of being too much alone. Though neither arrogant nor envious, Will found little pleasure in the society of people who, from any point of view, were notably his superiors; even as he could not subordinate himself in money-earning relations, so did he become ill-at-ease, lose all spontaneity, in company above his social or intellectual level. Such a man's danger was obvious; he might, in default of congenial associates, decline upon inferiors; all the more that a softness of heart, a fineness of humanity, ever disposed him to feel and show special kindness for the poor, the distressed, the unfortunate. Sherwood's acquaintances had little attraction for him; they were mostly people who lived in a luxurious way, went in for sports, talked about the money market—all of which things fascinated Godfrey, though in truth he was far from belonging by nature to that particular world. With Franks, Will could be wholly himself, enjoying the slight advantage of his larger means, extending his knowledge without undue obligation, and getting all the good that comes to a man from the exercise of his kindliest feelings.

With less of geniality, because more occupied with himself, Norbert Franks resembled his new friend in a distaste for ordinary social pleasures and an enjoyment of the intimacies of life. He stood very much alone in the world, and from the age of eighteen he had in one way or another supported himself, chiefly by work on illustrated papers. His father, who belonged to what is called a good

family, began life in easy circumstances, and gained some reputation as a connoisseur of art; imprudence and misfortune having obliged him to sell his collection, Mr. Franks took to buying pictures and bric-a-brac for profit, and during the last ten years of his life was associated in that capacity with a London firm. Norbert, motherless from infancy and an only child, received his early education at expensive schools, but, showing little aptitude for study and much for use of the pencil, was taken by his father at twelve years old to Paris, and there set to work under a good art-teacher. At sixteen he went to Italy, where he remained for a couple of years. Then, on a journey in the East, the elder Franks died. Norbert returned to England, learnt that a matter of fifty pounds was all his heritage, and pluckily turned to the task of keeping himself alive. Herein his foreign sketch-books proved serviceable, but the struggle was long and hard before he could house himself decently, and get to serious work as a painter. Later on, he was wont to say that this poverty had been the best possible thing for him, its enforced abstinences having come just at the time when he had begun to "wallow"—his word for any sort of excess; and "wallowing" was undoubtedly a peril to which Norbert's temper particularly exposed him. Short commons made him, as they have made many another youth, sober and chaste, at all events in practice; and when he began to lift up his head, a little; when, at the age of three-and-twenty, he earned what seemed to him at first the luxurious income of a pound or so a week; when, in short, the inclination to "wallow" might again have taken hold upon him, it was his chance to fall in love so seriously and

hopefully that all the better features of his character were drawn out, emphasized, and, as it seemed, for good and all established in predominance.

Not long after his first meeting with Warburton, he one day received, through the publishers of a book he had illustrated, a letter signed "Ralph Pomfret," the writer of which asked whether "Norbert Franks" was the son of an old friend of whom he had lost sight for many years. By way of answer, Franks called upon his correspondent, who lived in a pleasant little house at Ashtead, in Surrey; he found a man of something less than sixty, with a touch of eccentricity in his thoughts and ways, by whom he was hospitably received, and invited to return whenever it pleased him. It was not very long before Franks asked permission to make the Pomfrets acquainted with his friend Warburton, a step which proved entirely justifiable. Together or separately, the two young men were often to be seen at Ashtead, whither they were attracted not only by the kindly and amusing talk of Ralph Pomfret, but at least as much by the grace and sweetness and sympathetic intelligence of the mistress of the house, for whom both entertained respect and admiration.

One Sunday afternoon, Warburton, tempted as usual by the thought of tea and talk in that delightful little garden, went out to Ashtead, and, as he pushed open the gate, was confused and vexed at the sight of strangers; there, before the house, stood a middle-aged gentleman and a young girl, chatting with Mrs. Pomfret. He would have turned away and taken himself off in disappointment, but that the clank of the gate had attracted attention, and he had no choice but

to move forward. The strangers proved to be Mrs. Pomfret's brother and his daughter; they had been spending half a year in the south of France, and were here for a day or two before returning to their home at Bath. When he had recovered his equanimity, Warburton became aware that the young lady was fair to look upon. Her age seemed about two-and-twenty; not very tall, she bore herself with perhaps a touch of conscious dignity and impressiveness; perfect health, a warm complexion, magnificent hair, eyes that shone with gaiety and good-nature, made of Rosamund Elvan a living picture such as Will Warburton had not often seen; he was shy in her presence, and by no means did himself justice that afternoon. His downcast eyes presently noticed that she wore shoes of a peculiar kind—white canvas with soles of plaited cord; in the course of conversation he learnt that these were a memento of the Basque country, about which Miss Elvan talked with a very pretty enthusiasm. Will went away, after all, in a dissatisfied mood. Girls were to him merely a source of disquiet. "If she be not fair for me—" was his ordinary thought; and he had never yet succeeded in persuading himself that any girl, fair or not, was at all likely to conceive the idea of devoting herself to his happiness. In this matter, an excessive modesty subdued him. It had something to do with his holding so much apart from general society.

On the evening of the next day, there was a thunderous knock at Warburton's flat, and in rushed Franks.

"You were at Ashtead yesterday," he cried.

"I was. What of that?"

"And you didn't come to tell me about the Elvans!"

"About Miss Elvan, I suppose you mean?" said Will.

"Well, yes, I do. I went there by chance this afternoon. The two men were away somewhere,—I found Mrs. Pomfret and that girl alone together. Never had such a delightful time in my life! But I say, Warburton, we must understand each other. Are you—do you—I mean, did she strike you particularly?"

Will threw back his head and laughed.

"You mean that?" shouted the other, joyously. "You really don't care—it's nothing to you?"

"Why, is it anything to *you*?"

"Anything? Rosamund Elvan is the most beautiful girl I ever saw, and the sweetest, and the brightest, and the altogether flooringest! And, by heaven and earth, I'm resolved to marry her!"