GEORGE GISSING

THE CROWN OF LIFE

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CHAPTER I

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Amid the throng of suburban arrivals volleyed forth from Waterloo Station on a May morning in the year '86, moved a slim, dark, absent-looking young man of one-and-twenty, whose name was Piers Otway. In regard to costume—blameless silk hat, and dark morning coat with lighter trousers—the City would not have disowned him, but he had not the City countenance. The rush for omnibus seats left him unconcerned; clear of the railway station, he walked at a moderate pace, his eyes mostly on the ground; he crossed the foot-bridge to Charing Cross, and steadily made his way into the Haymarket, where his progress was arrested by a picture shop.

A window hung with engravings, mostly after pictures of the day; some of them very large, and attractive to a passing glance. One or two admirable landscapes offered solace to the street-wearied imagination, but upon these Piers Otway did not fix his eye; it was drawn irresistibly to the faces and forms of beautiful women set forth with varied allurement. Some great lady of the passing time lounged in exquisite array amid luxurious furniture lightly suggested; the faint smile of her flattered loveliness hovered about the gazer; the subtle perfume of her presence touched his nerves; the greys of her complexion transmuted themselves through the current of his blood into life's carnation; whilst he dreamed upon her lips, his breath was caught, as though of a sudden she had smiled for him, and for him alone. Near to her was a maiden of Hellas, resting upon a marble seat,

her eyes bent towards some AEgean isle; the translucent robe clung about her perfect body; her breast was warm against the white stone; the mazes of her woven hair shone with unguent. The gazer lost himself in memories of epic and idyll, warming through worship to desire. Then his look strayed to the next engraving; a peasant girl, consummate in grace and strength, supreme in chaste pride, cheek and neck soft-glowing from the sunny field, eyes revealing the heart at one with nature. Others there were, women of many worlds, only less beautiful; but by these three the young man was held bound. He could not satisfy himself with looking and musing; he could not pluck himself away. An old experience; he always lingered by the print shops of the Haymarket, and always went on with troubled blood, with mind rapt above familiar circumstance, dreaming passionately, making wild forecast of his fate.

At this hour of the morning not many passers had leisure to stand and gaze; one, however, came to a pause beside Piers Otway, and viewed the engravings. He was a man considerably older; not so well dressed, but still, on the strength of externals, entitled to the style of gentleman; his brown, hard felt hat was entirely respectable, as were his tan gloves and his boots, but the cut-away coat began to hint at release from service, and the trousers owed a superficial smartness merely to being tightly strapped. This man had a not quite agreeable face; inasmuch as it was smoothly shaven, and exhibited a peculiar mobility, it might have denoted him an actor; but the actor is wont to twinkle a good-natured mood which did not appear upon this visage. The contour was good, and spoke intelligence; the

eyes must once have been charming. It was a face which had lost by the advance of years; which had hardened where it was soft, and seemed likely to grow harder yet; for about the lips, as he stood examining these pictures, came a suggestion of the vice in blood which tends to cruelty. The nostrils began to expand and to tremble a little; the eyes seemed to project themselves; the long throat grew longer. Presently, he turned a glance upon the young man standing near to him, and in that moment his expression entirely altered.

"Why," he exclaimed, "Piers!"

The other gave a start of astonishment, and at once smiled recognition.

"Daniel! I hadn't looked—I had no idea——" They shook hands, with graceful cordiality on the elder man's part, with a slightly embarrassed goodwill on that of the younger. Daniel Otway, whose age was about eight-and-thirty, stood in the relation of half-brotherhood to Piers, a relation suggested by no single trait of their visages. Piers had a dark complexion, a face of the square, emphatic type, and an eye of shy vivacity; Daniel, with the long, smooth curves of his countenance and his chestnut hair was, in the common sense, better looking, and managed his expression with a skill which concealed the characteristics visible a few moments ago; he bore himself like a suave man of the world, whereas his brother still betrayed something of the boy in tone and gesture, something, too, of the student accustomed to seclusion. Daniel's accent had nothing at all in keeping with a shabby coat; that of the younger man was less markedly refined, with much more of individuality.

"You live in London?" inquired Daniel, reading the other's look as if affectionately.

"No. Out at Ewell—in Surrey."

"Oh yes, I know Ewell. Reading?"

"Yes for the Civil Service. I've come up to lunch with a man who knows father—Mr. Jacks."

"John Jacks, the M.P.?"

Piers nodded nervously, and the other regarded him with a smile of new interest.

"But you're very early. Any other engagements?"

"None," said Piers. It being so fine a morning, he had proposed a long ramble about London streets before making for his destination in the West End.

"Then you must come to my club," returned Daniel. "I shall be glad of a talk with you, very glad, my dear boy. Why, it must be four years since we saw each other. And, by the bye, you are just of age, I think?"

"Three days ago."

"To be sure. Heard anything from father?—No?—You're looking very well, Piers—take my arm. I understood you were going into business. Altered your mind? And how is the dear old man?"

They walked for a quarter of an hour, turning at last into a quiet, genteel byway westward of Regent Street, and so into a club house of respectable appearance. Daniel wrote his brother's name, and led up to the smoking-room, which they found unoccupied.

"You smoke?—I am very glad to hear it. I began far too young, and have suffered. It's too early to drink—and perhaps you don't do that either?—Really? Vegetarian also,

perhaps?—Why, you are the model son of your father. And the regime seems to suit you. *Per Bacco*! couldn't follow it myself: but I, like our fat friend, am little better than one of the wicked. So you are one-and-twenty. You have entered upon your inheritance, I presume?"

Piers answered with a look of puzzled inquiry.

"Haven't you heard about it? The little capital due to you."

"Not a word!"

"That's odd. *Was soil es bedeuten*?—By the bye, I suppose you speak German well?"

"Tolerably."

"And French?"

"Moderately."

"*Benissimo*!" Daniel had just lit a cigar; he lounged gracefully, observing his brother with an eye of veiled keenness. "Well, I think there is no harm in telling you that you are entitled to something—your mother's money, you know."

"I had no idea of it," replied Piers, whom the news had in some degree excited.

"Apropos, why don't you live with father? Couldn't you read as well down there?"

"Not quite, I think, and—the truth is, the stepmother doesn't much like me. She's rather difficult to get on with you know."

"I imagined it. So you're just in lodgings?"

"I am with some people called Hannaford. I got to know them at Geneva—they're not very well off; I have a room and they board me."

"I must look you up there—Piers, my dear boy, I suppose you know your mother's history?"

It was asked with an affected carelessness, with a look suggestive of delicacy in approaching the subject. More and more perturbed, Piers abruptly declared his ignorance; he sat in an awkward attitude, bending forward; his brows were knit, his dark eyes had a solemn intensity, and his square jaw asserted itself more than usual.

"Well, between brothers, I don't see why you shouldn't. In fact, I am a good deal surprised that the worthy old man has held his peace about that legacy, and I don't think I shall scruple to tell you all I know. You are aware, at all events, that our interesting parent has been a little unfortunate in his matrimonial adventures. His first wife—not to pick one's phrase—quarrelled furiously with him. His second, you inform me, is somewhat difficult to live with."

"His *third*," interrupted Piers.

"No, my dear boy," said the other gravely, sympathetically. "That intermediate connection was not legal."

"Not——? My mother was not——?"

"Don't worry about it," proceeded Daniel in a kind tone. "These are the merest prejudices, you know. She could not become Mrs. Otway, being already Mrs. Somebody-else. Her death, I fear, was a great misfortune to our parent. I have gathered that they suited each other—fate, you know, plays these little tricks. Your mother, I am sure, was a most charming and admirable woman—I remember her portrait. *A l'heure qu'il est*, no doubt, it has to be kept out of sight. She

had, I am given to understand, a trifling capital of her own, and this was to become yours."

Piers stared at vacancy. When he recovered himself he said with decision:

"Of course I shall hear about it. There's no hurry. Father knows I don't want it just now. Why, of course he will tell me. The exam. comes off in autumn, and no doubt he keeps the news back as a sort of reward when I get my place. I think that would be just like him, you know."

"Or as a solatium, if you fail," remarked the other genially.

"Fail? Oh, I'm not going to fail," cried Piers in a voice of half-resentful confidence.

"Bravo!" laughed the other; "I like that spirit. So you're going to lunch with John Jacks. I don't exactly know him, but I know friends of his very well. Known him long?"

Piers explained that as yet he had no personal acquaintance with Mr. Jacks; that he had, to his surprise, received a written invitation a few days ago.

"It may be useful," Daniel remarked reflectively. "But if you'll permit the liberty, Piers, I am sorry you didn't pay a little more attention to costume. It should have been a frock coat—really it should."

"I haven't such a thing," exclaimed the younger brother, with some annoyance and confusion. "And what can it matter? You know very well how father would go."

"Yes, yes; but Jerome Otway the democratic prophet and young Mr. Piers Otway his promising son, are very different persons. Never mind, but take care to get a frock coat; you'll

find it indispensable if you are going into that world. Where does Jacks live?"

"Queen's Gate."

Daniel Otway meditated, half closing his eyes as he seemed to watch the smoke from his cigar. Dropping them upon his brother, he found that the young man wore a look of troubled thoughtfulness.

"Daniel," began Piers suddenly, "are you quite sure about all you have told me?"

"Quite. I am astonished it's news to you."

Piers was no longer able to converse, and very soon he found it difficult to sit still. Observant of his face and movements, the elder brother proposed that they should resume their walk together, and forth they went. But both were now taciturn, and they did not walk far in company.

"I shall look you up at Ewell," said Daniel, taking leave. "Address me at that club; I have no permanent quarters just now. We must see more of each other."

And Piers went his way with shadowed countenance.

CHAPTER II

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Straying about Kensington Gardens in the pleasant sunshine, his mind occupied with Daniel's information, Piers Otway lost count of time, and at last had to hurry to keep his engagement. As he entered the house in Queen's Gate, a mirrored image of himself made him uneasy about his costume. But for Daniel, such a point would never have troubled him. It was with an unfamiliar sense of irritation and misgiving that he moved into the drawing-room.

A man of sixty or so, well preserved, with a warm complexion, broad homely countenance and genial smile, stepped forward to receive him. Mr. Jacks was member for the Penistone Division of the West Riding; new to Parliament, having entered with the triumphant Liberals in the January of this year 1886. His friends believed, and it seemed credible, that he had sought election to please the lady whom, as a widower of twenty years' endurance, he had wedded only a short time before; politics interested him but moderately, and the greater part of his life had been devoted to the manufacturing business which brought him wealth and local influence. Not many people remembered that in the days of his youth John Jacks had been something of a Revolutionist, that he had supported the People's Charter; that he had written, nay had published, verses of democratic tenor, earning thereby dark reputation in the respectable society of his native town. The turning-point was his early marriage. For a while he still wrote verses—of another kind, but he ceased to talk about liberty, ceased to

attend public meetings, and led an entirely private life until, years later, his name became reputably connected with municipal affairs. Observing Mr. Jacks' face, one saw the possibility of that early enthusiasm; he had fine eyes full of subdued tenderness, and something youthful, impulsive, in his expression when he uttered a thought. Good-humoured, often merry, abounding in kindness and generosity, he passed for a man as happy as he was prosperous; yet those who talked intimately with him obtained now and then a glimpse of something not quite in harmony with these characteristics, a touch of what would be called fancifulness, of uncertain spirits. Men of his world knew that he was not particularly shrewd in commerce; the great business to which his name was attached had been established by his father, and was kept flourishing mainly by the energy of his younger brother. As an occasional lecturer before his townsfolk, he gave evidence of wide reading and literary aptitudes. Of three children of his first marriage, two had died; his profound grief at their loss, and the inclination for domestic life which always appeared in the man, made it matter for surprise that he had waited so long before taking another wife. It would not have occurred to most of those who knew him that his extreme devotion to women made him shy, diffident, all but timorous in their presence. But Piers Otway, for all his mental disturbance at this moment, remarked the singular deference, the tone and look of admiring gentleness, with which Mr. Jacks turned to his wife as he presented their guest.

Mrs. Jacks was well fitted to inspire homage. Her age appeared to be less than five-and-twenty; she was of that

tall and gracefully commanding height which became the English ideal in the last quarter of the century—her portrait appears on every page illustrated by Du Manner. She had a brilliant complexion, a perfect profile; her smile, though perhaps a little mechanical, was the last expression of immutable sweetness, of impeccable self-control; her voice never slipped from the just note of unexaggerated suavity. Consummate as an ornament of the drawing-room, she would be no less admirably at ease on the tennis lawn, in the boat, on horseback, or walking by the seashore. Beyond criticism her breeding; excellent her education. There appeared, too, in her ordinary speech, her common look, a real amiability of disposition; one could not imagine her behaving harshly or with conscious injustice. Her manners—within the recognised limits—were frank, spontaneous; she had for the most part a liberal tone in conversation, and was evidently quite incapable of bitter feeling on any everyday subject. Piers Otway bent before her with unfeigned reverence; she dazzled him, she delighted and confused his senses. As often as he dared look at her, his eye discovered some new elegance in her attitude, some marvel of delicate beauty in the details of her person. A spectator might have observed that this worship was manifest to Mr. Jacks, and that it by no means displeased him.

"You are very like your father, Mr. Otway," was the host's first remark after a moment of ceremony. "Very like what he was forty years ago." He laughed, not quite naturally, glancing at his wife. "At that time he and I were much together. But he went to London; I stayed in the North; and so we lost sight of each other for many a long year.

Somewhere about 1870 we met by chance, on a Channel steamer; yes, it was just before the war; I remember your father prophesied it, and foretold its course very accurately. Then we didn't see each other again until a month ago—I had run down into Yorkshire for a couple of days and stood waiting for a train at Northallerton. Someone came towards me, and looked me in the face, then held out his hand without speaking; and it was my old friend. He has become a man of few words."

"Yes, he talks very little," said Piers. "I've known him silent for two or three days together."

"And what does he do with himself there among the moors? You don't know Hawes," he remarked to the graciously attentive Mrs. Jacks. "A little stony town at the wild end of Wensleydale. Delightful for a few months, but very grim all the rest of the year. Has he any society there?"

"None outside his home, I think. He sits by the fire and reads Dante."

"Dante?"

"Yes, Dante; he seems to care for hardly anything else. It has been so for two or three years. Editions of Dante and books about Dante crowd his room—they are constantly coming. I asked him once if he was going to write on the subject, but he shook his head."

"It must be a very engrossing study," remarked Mrs. Jacks, with her most intelligent air. "Dante opens such a world."

"Strange!" murmured her husband, with his kindly smile. "The last thing I should have imagined."

They were summoned to luncheon. As they entered the dining-room, there appeared a young man whom Mr. Jacks greeted warmly.

"Hullo, Arnold! I am so glad you lunch here to-day. Here is the son of my old friend Jerome Otway."

Arnold Jacks pressed the visitor's hand and spoke a few courteous words in a remarkably pleasant voice. In physique he was quite unlike his father; tall, well but slenderly built, with a small finely-shaped head, large grey-blue eyes and brown hair. The delicacy of his complexion and the lines of his figure did not suggest strength, yet he walked with a very firm step, and his whole bearing betokened habits of healthy activity. In early years he had seemed to inherit a very feeble constitution; the death of his brother and sister, followed by that of their mother at an untimely age, left little hope that he would reach manhood; now, in his thirtieth year, he was rarely troubled on the score of health, and few men relieved from the necessity of earning money found fuller occupation for their time. Some portion of each day he spent at the offices of a certain Company, which held rule in a British colony of considerable importance. His interest in this colony had originated at the time when he was gaining vigour and enlarging his experience in world-wide travel; he enjoyed the sense of power, and his voice did not lack weight at the Board of the Company in question. He had all manner of talents and pursuits. Knowledge—the only kind of knowledge he cared for, that of practical things, things alive in the world of to-day—seemed to come to him without any effort on his part. A new invention concealed no mysteries from him; he looked into

it; understood, calculated its scope. A strange piece of news from any part of the world found him unsurprised, explanatory. He liked mathematics, and was wont to say jocosely that an abstract computation had a fine moral effect, favouring unselfishness. Music was one of his foibles; he learnt an instrument with wonderful facility, and, up to a certain point, played well. For poetry, though as a rule he disguised the fact, he had a strong distaste; once, when aged about twenty, he startled his father by observing that "In Memoriam" seemed to him a shocking instance of wasted energy; he would undertake to compress the whole significance of each section, with its laborious rhymings, into two or three lines of good clear prose. Naturally the young man had undergone no sentimental troubles; he had not yet talked of marrying, and cared only for the society of mature women who took common-sense views of life. His religion was the British Empire; his saints, the men who had made it; his prophets, the politicians and publicists who held most firmly the Imperial tone.

Where Arnold Jacks was in company, there could be no dullness. Alone with his host and hostess, Otway would have found the occasion rather solemn, and have wished it over, but Arnold's melodious voice, his sprightly discussion and anecdotage, his frequent laughter, charmed the guest into self-oblivion.

"You are no doubt a Home Ruler, Mr. Otway," observed Arnold, soon after they were seated.

"Yes, I am," answered Piers cheerily. "You too, I hope?"

"Why, yes. I would grant Home Rule of the completest description, and I would let it run its natural course for—

shall we say five years? When the state of Ireland had become intolerable to herself and dangerous to this adjacent island, I would send over dragoons. And," he added quietly, crumbling his bread, "the question would not rise again."

"Arnold," remarked Mr. Jacks, with good humour, "you are quite incapable of understanding this question. We shall see. Mr. Gladstone's Bill——"

"Mr. Gladstone's *little* Bill—do say his *little* Bill."

"Arnold, you are too absurd!" exclaimed the hostess mirthfully.

"What does your father think?" Mr. Jacks inquired of their guest. "Has he broken silence on the subject?"

"I think not. He never says a word about politics."

"The little Bill hasn't a chance," cried Arnold. "Your majority is melting away. You, of course, will stand by the old man, but that is chivalry, not politics. You don't know what a picturesque figure you make, sir; you help me to realise Horatius Codes, and that kind of thing."

John Jacks laughed heartily at his own expense, but his wife seemed to think the jest unmannerly. Home Rule did not in the least commend itself to her sedate, practical mind, but she would never have committed such an error in taste as to proclaim divergence from her husband's views.

"It is a most difficult and complicated question," she said, addressing herself to Otway. "The character of the people makes it so; the Irish are so sentimental."

Upon the young man's ear this utterance fell strangely; it gave him a little shock, and he could only murmur some

commonplace of assent. With men, Piers had plenty of moral courage, but women daunted him.

"I heard a capital idea last night," resumed Arnold Jacks, "from a man I was dining with—interesting fellow called Hannaford. He suggested that Ireland should be made into a military and naval depot—used solely for that purpose. The details of his scheme were really very ingenious. He didn't propose to exterminate the natives——"

John Jacks interrupted with hilarity, which his son affected to resent: the look exchanged by the two making pleasant proof of how little their natural affection was disturbed by political and other differences. At the name of Hannaford, Otway had looked keenly towards the speaker.

"Is that Lee Hannaford?" he asked. "Oh, I know him. In fact, I'm living in his house just now."

Arnold was interested. He had only the slightest acquaintance with Hannaford, and would like to hear more of him.

"Not long ago," Piers responded, "he was a teacher of chemistry at Geneva—I got to know him there. He seems to speak half a dozen languages in perfection; I believe he was born in Switzerland. His house down in Surrey is a museum of modern weapons—a regular armoury. He has invented some new gun."

"So I gathered. And a new explosive, I'm told."

"I hope he doesn't store it in his house?" said Mr. Jacks, looking with concern at Piers.

"I've had a moment's uneasiness about that, now and then," Otway replied, laughing, "especially after hearing him talk."

"A tremendous fellow!" Arnold exclaimed admiringly. "He showed me, by sketch diagrams, how many men he could kill within a given space."

"If this gentleman were not your friend, Mr. Otway," began the host, "I should say——"

"Oh, pray say whatever you like! He isn't my friend at all, and I detest his inventions."

"Shocking!" fell sweetly from the lady at the head of the table.

"As usual, I must beg leave to differ," put in Arnold. "What would become of us if we left all that kind of thing to the other countries? Hannaford is a patriot. He struck me as quite disinterested; personal gain is nothing to him. He loves his country, and is using his genius in her service."

John Jacks nodded.

"Well, yes, yes. But I wish your father were here, Mr. Otway, to give his estimate of such genius; at all events if he thinks as he did years ago. Get him on that topic, and he was one of the most eloquent men living. I am convinced that he only wanted a little more self-confidence to become a real power in public life—a genuine orator, such, perhaps, as England has never had."

"Nor ever will have," Arnold interrupted. "We act instead of talking."

"My dear boy," said his father weightily, "we talk very much, and very badly; in pulpit, and Parliament, and press. We want the man who has something new to say, and knows how to say it. For my own part, I don't think, when he comes, that he will glorify explosives. I want to hear someone talk about Peace—and *not* from the commercial

point of view. The slaughterers shan't have it all their own way, Arnold; civilisation will be too strong for them, and if Old England doesn't lead in that direction, it will be her shame to the end of history."

Arnold smiled, but kept silence. Mrs. Jacks looked and murmured her approval.

"I wish Hannaford could hear you," said Piers Otway.

When they rose from the table, John Jacks invited the young man to come with him into his study for a little private talk.

"I haven't many books here," he said, noticing Otway's glance at the shelves. "My library is down in Yorkshire, at the old home; where I shall be very glad indeed to see you, whenever you come north in vacation-time. Well now, let us make friends; tell me something about yourself. You are reading for the Civil Service, I understand?"

Piers liked Mr. Jacks, and was soon chatting freely. He told how his education had begun at a private school in London, how he had then gone to school at Geneva, and, when seventeen years old, had entered an office of London merchants, dealing with Russia.

"It wasn't my own choice. My father talked to me, and seemed so anxious for me to go into business that I made no objection. I didn't understand him then, but I think I do now. You know"—he added in a lower tone—"that I have two elder brothers?"

"Yes, I know. And a word that fell from your father at Northallerton the other day—I think I understand."

"Both went in for professions," Otway pursued, "and I suppose he wasn't very well satisfied with the results.

However, after I had been two years in the office, I felt I couldn't stand it, and I began privately to read law. Then one day I wrote to my father, and asked whether he would allow me to be articled to a solicitor. He replied that he would, if, at the age of twenty, I had gone steadily on with the distasteful office work, and had continued to read law in my leisure. Well, I accepted this, of course, and in a year's time found how right he had been; already I had got sick of the law books, and didn't care for the idea of being articled. I told father that, and he asked me to wait six months more, and then to let him know my mind again. I hadn't got to like business any better, and one day it seemed to me that I would try for a place in a Government office. When the time came, I suggested this, and my father ultimately agreed. I lived with him at Hawes for a month or two, then came into Surrey, to work on for the examination. We shall see what I get."

The young man spoke with a curious blending of modesty and self-confidence, of sobriety beyond his years and the glow of a fervid temperament. He seemed to hold himself consciously in restraint, but, as if to compensate for subdued language, he used more gesticulation than is common with Englishmen. Mr. Jacks watched him very closely, and, when he ceased, reflected for a moment.

"True; we shall see. You are working steadily?"

"About fourteen hours a day."

"Too much! too much!—All at the Civil Service subjects?"

"No; I manage a few other things. For instance, I'm trying to learn Russian. Father says he made the attempt long ago, but was beaten. I don't think I shall give in."

"Your father knew Herzen and Bakounine, in the old days. Well, don't overdo it; don't neglect the body. We must have another talk before long."

Again Mr. Jacks looked thoughtfully at the keen young face, and his countenance betrayed a troublous mood.

"How you remind me of my old friend, forty years ago—forty years ago!"

CHAPTER III

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A little apart from the village of Ewell, within sight of the noble trees and broad herbage of Nonsuch Park, and looking southward to the tilth and pasture of the Downs, stood the house occupied by Mr. Lee Hannaford. It was just too large to be called a cottage; not quite old enough to be picturesque; a pleasant enough dwelling, amid its green garden plot, sheltered on the north side by a dark hedge of yew, and shut from the quiet road by privet topped with lilac and laburnum. This day of early summer, fresh after rains, with a clear sky and the sun wide-gleaming over young leaf and bright blossom, with Nature's perfume wafted along every alley, about every field and lane, showed the spot at its best. But it was with no eye to natural beauty that Mr. Hannaford had chosen this abode; such considerations left him untouched. He wanted a cheap house not far from London, where his wife's uncertain health might receive benefit, and where the simplicity of the surroundings would offer no temptations to casual expense. For his own part, he was a good deal from home, coming and going as it suited him; a very small income from capital, and occasional earnings by contribution to scientific journalism, left slender resources to Mrs. Hannaford and her daughter after the husband's needs were supplied. Thus it came about that they gladly ceded a spare room to Piers Otway, who, having boarded with them during his student time at Geneva, had at long intervals kept up a correspondence with Mrs. Hannaford, a lady he admired.

The rooms were indifferently furnished; in part, owing to poverty, and partly because neither of the ladies cared much for things domestic. Mr. Hannaford's sanctum alone had character; it was hung about with lethal weapons of many kinds and many epochs, including a memento of every important war waged in Europe since the date of Waterloo. A smoke-grimed rifle from some battlefield was in Hannaford's view a thing greatly precious; still more, a bayonet with stain of blood; these relics appealed to his emotions. Under glass were ranged minutiae such as bullets, fragments of shells, bits of gore-drenched cloth or linen, a splinter of human bone—all ticketed with neat inscription. A bookcase contained volumes of military history, works on firearms, treatises on (chiefly explosive) chemistry; several great portfolios were packed with maps and diagrams of warfare. Upstairs, a long garret served as laboratory, and here were ranged less valuable possessions; weapons to which some doubt attached, unbloody scraps of accoutrements, also a few models of cannon and the like.

In society, Hannaford was an entertaining, sometimes a charming, man, with a flow of well-informed talk, of agreeable anecdote; his friends liked to have him at the dinner-table; he could never be at a loss for a day or two's board and lodging when his home wearied him. Under his own roof he seldom spoke save to find fault, rarely showed anything but acrid countenance. He and his wife were completely alienated; but for their child, they would long ago have parted. It had been a love match, and the daughter's name, Olga, still testified to the romance of their honeymoon; but that was nearly twenty years gone by, and

of these at least fifteen had been spent in discord, concealed or flagrant. Mrs. Hannaford was something of an artist; her husband spoke of all art with contempt—except the great art of human slaughter. She liked the society of foreigners; he, though a remarkable linguist, at heart distrusted and despised all but English-speaking folk. As a girl in her teens, she had been charmed by the man's virile accomplishments, his soldierly bearing and gay talk of martial things, though Hannaford was only a teacher of science. Nowadays she thought with dreary wonder of that fascination, and had come to loathe every trapping and habiliment of war. She knew him profoundly selfish, and recognised the other faults which had hindered so clever a man from success in life; indolent habits, moral untrustworthiness, and a conceit which at times menaced insanity. He hated her, she was well aware, because of her cold criticism; she returned his hate with interest.

Save in suicide, of which she had sometimes thought, Mrs. Hannaford saw but one hope of release. A sister of hers had married a rich American, and was now a widow in failing health. That sister's death might perchance endow her with the means of liberty; she hung upon every message from across the Atlantic.

She had a brother, too; a distinguished, but not a wealthy man. Dr. Derwent would gladly have seen more of her, gladly have helped to cheer her life, but a hearty antipathy held him aloof from Lee Hannaford. Communication between the two families was chiefly maintained through Dr. Derwent's daughter Irene, now in her nineteenth year. The girl had visited her aunt at Geneva, and since then had

occasionally been a guest at Ewell. Having just returned from a winter abroad with her father, and no house being ready for her reception in London, Irene was even now about to pass a week with her relatives. They expected her to-day. The prospect of Irene's arrival enabled Mrs. Hannaford and Olga to find pleasure in the sunshine, which otherwise brought them little solace.

Neither was in sound health. The mother had an interesting face; the daughter had a touch of beauty; but something morbid appeared on the countenance of each. They lived a strange life, lonely, silent; the stillness of the house unbroken by a note of music, unrelieved by a sound of laughter. In the neighbourhood they had no friends; only at long intervals did a London acquaintance come thus far to call upon them. But for the presence of Piers Otway at meals, and sometimes in the afternoon or evening, they would hardly have known conversation. For when Hannaford was at home, his sour muteness discouraged any kind of talk; in his absence, mother and daughter soon exhausted all they had to say to each other, and read or brooded or nursed their headaches apart.

With the coming of Irene, gloom vanished. It had always been so, since the beginning of her girlhood; the name of Irene Derwent signified miseries forgotten, mirthful hours, the revival of health and hope. Unable to resist her influence, Hannaford always kept as much as possible out of the way when she was under his roof; the conflict between inclination to unbend and stubborn coldness towards his family made him too uncomfortable. Vivaciously tactful in this as in all things, Irene had invented a pleasant fiction

which enabled her to meet Mr. Hannaford without embarrassment; she always asked him "How is your neuralgia?" And the man, according as he felt, made answer that it was better or worse. That neuralgia was often a subject of bitter jest between Mrs. Hannaford and Olga, but it had entered into the life of the family, and at times seemed to be believed in even by the imagined sufferer.

Nothing could have been more characteristic of Irene. Wit at the service of good feeling expressed her nature.

Her visit this time would be specially interesting, for she had passed the winter in Finland, amid the intellectual society of Helsingfors. Letters had given a foretaste of what she would have to tell, but Irene was no great letter-writer. She had an impatience of remaining seated at a desk. She did not even read very much. Her delight was in conversation, in movement, in active life. For several years her father had made her his companion, as often as possible, in holiday travel and on the journeys prompted by scientific study. Though successful as a medical man, Dr. Derwent no longer practised; he devoted himself to pathological research, and was making a name in the world of science. His wife, who had died young, left him two children; the elder, Eustace, was an amiable and intelligent young man, but had small place in his father's life compared with that held by Irene.

She was to arrive at Ewell in time for luncheon. Her brother would bring her, and return to London in the afternoon.

Olga walked to the station to meet them. Mrs. Hannaford having paid unusual attention to her dress—she had long

since ceased to care how she looked, save on very exceptional occasions—moved impatiently, nervously, about the house and the garden. Her age was not yet forty, but a life of disappointment and unrest had dulled her complexion, made her movements languid, and was beginning to touch with grey her soft, wavy hair. Under happier circumstances she would have been a most attractive woman; her natural graces were many, her emotions were vivid and linked with a bright intelligence, her natural temper inclined to the nobler modes of life. Unfortunately, little care had been given to her education; her best possibilities lay undeveloped; thrown upon her inadequate resources, she nourished the weaknesses instead of the virtues of her nature. She was always saying to herself that life had gone by, and was wasted; for life meant love, and love in her experience had been a flitting folly, an error of crude years, which should, in all justice, have been thrown aside and forgotten, allowing her a second chance. Too late, now. Often she lay through the long nights shedding tears of misery. Too late; her beauty blurred, her heart worn with suffering, often poisoned with bitterness. Yet there came moments of revolt, when she rose and looked at herself in the mirror, and asked——But for Olga, she would have tried to shape her own destiny.

To-day she could look up at the sunshine. Irene was coming.

A sound of young voices in the quiet road; then the shimmer of a bright costume, the gleam of a face all health and charm and merriment. Irene came into the garden, followed by her brother, and behind them Olga.