

(13) CHAPTER 7.

THEIR NEW London home in the Protectoral Palace was near enough to Windsor, to remove the pain from separation when we left Raymond and Perdita installed there. I'd been glad see my sister enter, as it were, into the spirit of the drama, and fill her station with becoming dignity. Her shy and humble manner was not artificial, but arose from that fear of not being properly appreciated, that nagging expectation of the world's neglect, which Raymond shared. But then Perdita thought more constantly of others than he did. Still, whereas for Idris, with her princess's birth, education, and lifetime of habit, the very ease of a life so based on ceremony would have rendered it tedious, for Perdita even its drawbacks were evidently enjoyable. She was too full of new ideas to be very sorry to see us go. As for Raymond, his spirits were unbounded. What to do with his new-got power? His head was full of plans. He'd made no decisions yet—but he promised himself, his friends, and the world, that the era of his Protectorship should be marked by some act of surpassing glory.

We talked of the couple, and moralized, but as our pared down troupe returned to Windsor Castle, we felt extreme

delight at our escape from political turmoil, and sought our solitude with redoubled zest. There was plenty to do. I turned my active, eager disposition to pure intellectual exertion, and found in hard study an excellent medicine to keep off the feverish spirits that indolence might have bred. What's more, Perdita had permitted us to take her little girl back with us to Windsor. Clara and my two lovely infants were perpetual sources of interest and amusement.

The only circumstance that disturbed our peace was Adrian's health. Its decline was clear, the diagnosis less so; his symptoms uncertain, only his brightened eyes, animated look, and strange blushes made us dread tuberculosis—we called it consumption; but if tubercular, he was without pain or fear. He betook himself to books with ardor, and reposed from his studies in the company he loved best, his sister's and mine. Sometimes he went up to London to visit Raymond and watch the progress of events. Clara often accompanied him in these excursions; partly that she might see her parents, partly because Adrian delighted in this lovely child's intelligent prattle.

Meanwhile all went on well in London. Parliament was meeting again, and Raymond was occupied in a thousand beneficial schemes. Canals, aqueducts, bridges, stately buildings, public works: he was continually surrounded by designers and project managers, whose brief was to render England an unbroken scene of fertility and magnificence. Poverty was to be abolished; disease, banished, and labor lightened of its heaviest burdens. People would ride mass transportation from place to

place almost with the same ease as the Princes Houssain, Ali, and Ahmed rode their magic carpet in the Tales of the Arabian Nights—indeed, the physical state of humankind would soon rival the beatitude of angels. This didn't seem extravagant. The arts of life, and the discoveries of science, had without question progressed at immeasurable rates; so that food appeared, so to say, spontaneously. Convenient machines existed to supply every want of the population. An evil tendency still survived, and people weren't happy—but that was only because they made too little effort to vanquish the obstacles they'd raised against themselves. Raymond was out to inspire them with his beneficial will. Once systematized according to faultless rules, the mechanism of society would never again swerve into disorder. For these hopes, he abandoned his long-cherished ambition of becoming known to world history as a successful warrior; laying aside his sword, he made peace and its enduring glories his aim instead. Benefactor of His Country was the title he coveted.

One of his pet projects was a new national gallery for statues and pictures. He owned a large collection, which he intended to give to the Republic; and, as the building was to be the great ornament of his Protectorship, he was very fastidious in his choice of architect. Hundreds of proposals were brought to him and rejected. He sent even to Italy and Greece. The plan must combine originality with perfect beauty, and he searched to no avail. At length a drawing came, with a post office box return address and no artist's name attached. The design was new and

elegant, but faulty; so faulty, that although drawn with skill and taste, it was evidently not the work of an architect. Raymond contemplated it with delight; the more he gazed, the more pleased he was; and yet the errors multiplied under inspection. He wrote to the address given and asked to meet, suggesting that some alterations might be made.

A Greek came; a middle-aged man, somewhat intelligent but so commonplace-looking, Raymond could scarcely believe he'd produced such a novel design. He was not an architect, he admitted; but the idea of the building had struck him. He'd sent it without the smallest hope of its being accepted. He was a man of few words. Raymond questioned him; but his reserved answers soon made him turn from the man to the drawing. He pointed out the errors, and the alterations that he wished to be made; he offered the Greek a pencil that he might correct the sketch on the spot; the visitor declined and said he'd understood perfectly, and would take the work home.

When he returned the next day, the design had been re-drawn but many defects still remained. Raymond could see that some of his instructions had been misunderstood. "Here," he said, "I yielded to you yesterday, now it's your turn to comply—take the pencil."

The Greek did, but he handled it as no artist would have. Finally he said, "I must confess to you, my Lord, that I did not make this drawing. It is impossible for you to see the real designer; your instructions must pass through me. Condescend therefore to have patience with my ignorance, and to explain

your wishes to me; in time I am certain that you will be satisfied.” Raymond questioned vainly; the mysterious Greek would say no more. Would an architect be permitted to see the artist? Another refusal. The visitor went off with a second set of instructions.

Our friend had resolved, however, to find out what he wanted to know. What he suspected as the cause of the mystery was an unaccustomed poverty, that left the artist unwilling to be seen under the conditions of want. All the more excited by the possibility of having discovered an obscure talent, Raymond had ordered a skilled member of his security detail to follow the Greek this time and see where he went. Sure enough, he was traced to one of the poorest streets in the city.

That same evening, Raymond went alone to the address. Poverty, dirt, and squalid misery: Alas! he thought, I have much to do before England becomes a Paradise. He knocked; the front door was unlatched by a string from above. A broken, wretched, unlit staircase confronted him. No one appeared; he knocked again, then started climbing up through the darkness to the artist’s garret. His main wish, particularly now that he’d seen how abject the dwelling, was to bring relief to one possessed of talent, but depressed by want. He was picturing a young man whose eyes sparkled with genius, whose person was attenuated by famine. Raymond half feared to displease him; but he trusted that his generous kindness would be administered so delicately, as not to excite repulse and refusal. What human heart is shut to kindness? Encouraged by this

thought, he finally stood at the top of the house. One door was ajar. He could see a pair of small Turkish slippers lying next to the threshold; but all was silent within. Guessing he'd found the right person, who wasn't at home, our adventurous Protector decided to enter, leave a sum of money on the table, and go away again. He pushed open the door—but found the room inhabited.

Raymond had never visited the dwellings of want, and the scene that now presented itself struck him to the heart. The floor had holes and sunken places, the walls were ragged and bare, the ceiling weather-stained. A tattered bed stood in one corner; the other furniture consisted of two chairs and a rough table, where stood a light in a tin candlestick. Yet in the midst of such dreary and heart-sickening poverty, there was an air of order and cleanliness that surprised him. The thought was fleeting; for his attention was instantly monopolized by the inhabitant of this wretched abode. It was a female. She sat at the table. One small hand shaded her eyes from the candle; the other held a pencil; her looks were fixed on a drawing before her, which Raymond recognized as the design. Her whole appearance awakened his deepest interest. Her dark hair was braided and twined in thick knots like the headdress of a Grecian statue; in her run-down clothes, she sat like someone modeling the height of grace. Raymond had a confused idea that he'd seen a form like hers before. He walked across the room. Without raising her eyes, she asked who was there.

“A friend,” replied Raymond, in the same Romaic dialect.

She looked up wondering, and he saw that it was Evadne Zaimi. Once the idol of Adrian's affections: Evadne, who, for the sake of her present visitor, had disdained that noble youth, and then, neglected by him she loved, devastated when he wed another, with crushed hopes and a stinging sense of misery had returned to her native Greece—what revolution of fortune could have brought her back to England, and housed her thus?

From the moment of recognition, Raymond's manner changed. The sight of her, in her present situation, passed like an arrow into his soul. Dropping all airs of polite beneficence, he sat by her, took her hand, said a thousand things which breathed the deepest spirit of compassion and affection. Evadne did not answer. She kept her large dark eyes cast down; at length a tear glimmered on the lashes.

“Look,” she cried, “what kindness can do, that no want, no misery ever could; I weep.” She shed indeed many tears; her head sank unconsciously onto Raymond's shoulder; he held her hand; he kissed her sunken tear-stained cheek. He told her that her sufferings were over.

No one possessed the art of consoling like Raymond. He didn't reason or declaim, but his look shone with sympathy, and all he said brought pleasant images before the unfortunate sufferer. His caresses excited no distrust, for they arose purely from the feeling which leads a mother to kiss her wounded child; a desire to demonstrate in every possible way his caring's sincerity, and the keenness of his wish to pour balm into a lacerated mind. As Evadne regained her composure, his

manner even turned playful; he called her his Princess in disguise. Something told him that it was not her poverty's present evils that lay heavily at her heart, but the debasement and disgrace it signified. He found her too much preoccupied by more engrossing thoughts to answer his warm offers of service. At length he left her with his promise to return the next day, and went home, full of mingled feelings, of pain excited by Evadne's wretchedness, and pleasure at the prospect of relieving it. Some motive for which he did not account, even to himself, prevented him from relating his adventure to Perdita.

The next day he disguised himself in a cloak and headed back to Evadne. Along the way, he bought a basket of costly Mediterranean fruits and piled it with various beautiful flowers. "Behold," cried he, as he entered the miserable garret of his friend, "what bird's food I have brought for my sparrow on the house-top."

Evadne now related the tale of her misfortunes. Her father, a man of high rank, had run through his fortune by the time a course of dissolute self-indulgence destroyed his reputation and influence as well. With his health impaired beyond hope of cure, it became his earnest wish, before he died, to save his daughter from the orphaned poverty in which he'd leave her. So he accepted on her behalf, and persuaded Evadne to agree to, a proposal of marriage from a wealthy Greek merchant settled at Istanbul. She left her native Greece; her father died; by degrees she was cut off from all the companions and ties of her youth.

The renewal of war between Greece and Turkey brought

more reverses of fortune. Her husband went bankrupt. Then came a tumult when the Turks threatened a massacre of the city's Greek inhabitants; obliged to flee in an open boat, the couple reached an British vessel, which had brought them to England. The few jewels they'd saved, supported them awhile. Evadne put all her energy into bolstering her husband's spirits. To no avail: his losses, his lack of occupation, and his hopelessness about the future, combined to reduce him to a state bordering on insanity. After five months in London, he committed suicide.

“You will ask me,” continued Evadne, “what I have done since. Why I haven't gone back to Greece? Of course, I couldn't afford to. Why haven't I gone to any of the rich Greeks who live in London, and asked them for money? All I can tell you is that I've had reasons enough to keep me going, day after day, enduring every wretchedness, rather than seek that kind of help. Shall the daughter of the noble, though prodigal, Zaimi, a man without superiors, lower herself to appear a beggar in front of—at best—her peers? Shall I bow my head before them, and with servile gestures sell my nobility for mere life? Had I a child, or any tie to bind me to existence, I might descend to this. But, as it is—the world has been to me a harsh step-mother; I feel ready to leave this place she seems to grudge me, and in the grave forget my pride, my struggles, my despair. The time will soon come; grief and starvation have already undermined my being; a very short time, and I shall have passed away. Unstained by the crime of self-destruction, unstung by the

memory of degradation, my spirit will throw aside the miserable world, and find such reward as fortitude and resignation may deserve. This may seem like madness to you—yet you also have pride and resolution. Do not wonder then at mine.”

Raymond was immediately eloquent and full of eager plans to restore his lovely friend to her rank in society, and to her lost prosperity. But Evadne checked him. No one, especially not her former friends, should know of her presence in England. She explained haughtily, “The Earl of Windsor’s relatives doubtless think that I injured him. Perhaps the Earl himself would be the first to acquit me, but probably I do not deserve acquittal. I acted then, as I ever must, from impulse. My present abode may at least prove the disinterestedness of my conduct. No matter: I don’t wish to plead my cause before any of them, not even before your Lordship, if you hadn’t discovered me first. My conduct will prove that I had rather die, than be held up to scorn. Behold the proud Evadne in her tatters! See the beggar-princess! There is snakebite in the thought. Promise me to keep my life here secret.”

He promised; but argued against Evadne’s next request, that he neither enter into any project for her benefit, nor himself offer relief. “Do not degrade me in my own eyes,” she said. “Poverty has long been my nurse; hard-featured she is, but honest.” She feared being disgraced in her own eyes. Stubborn against Raymond’s fervent persuasions to overcome her feelings, she finally grew agitated into making a wild, passionate, solemn vow to run and hide herself where he never could

find her, someplace where hunger would soon bring death to end her woes, if he persisted in his offers. She could support herself, she said, and showed him how, by executing various designs and paintings, she actually earned a pittance. Raymond yielded for the present. He was sure, if he humored her properly, that friendship and reason would gain the day.

But the feelings that drove Evadne were rooted in the depths of her being, and grew in ways he had no means of understanding. Evadne loved Raymond. He was the hero of her imagination, the single image carved by love in the unchanged texture of her heart. He had served her country against the Turks, in her own land acquired that military glory peculiarly dear to the Greeks. Seven years ago, in her youthful prime, she'd fallen hard for him. Yet her love did not purchase his, her love was unreturned. While Raymond's heart was vacillating between Perdita and a crown, Evadne left England; the news of his marriage reached her, and her hopes, frost-struck blossoms, withered and fell. The glory of life was gone for her; the roseate halo of love, which had imbued every object with its own color, faded; she was content to take life as it was, and to make the best of a leaden reality.

She married; and new scenes awoke her restless energy of character. Her thoughts turned to gaining a title and power. In the Danube principality of Wallachia, her efforts to set her husband at the head of state brought her close to her goal of becoming a Princess again. But she lived to find ambition as unreal a delusion as love. Her effective intrigues with Russia

provoked the animosity of the Turkish and Greek governments, who both accused her of treason. Her husband's financial ruin followed. Her crimes being capital, she'd avoided death by a timely flight; the threatened massacre she'd mentioned to Raymond was a fable. Nor had she confessed, that in seeking help among her fellow Greeks, she'd have been repulsed and denied as the worst kind of criminal, a traitor to her country's battle against foreign despotism.

She knew herself to be the cause of her husband's utter ruin, and set herself to bear the consequences, along with the reproaches which his agony extorted from him; or worse, the cureless, uncomplaining depression, when his mind was sunk in a torpor, no less painful for being inert. Later she reproached herself with the crime of his death. Guilt and its punishments appeared to surround her. In vain she endeavored to allay remorse by thinking of her real integrity; the rest of the world, and she among them, judged her actions by their consequences. She prayed for her husband's soul; she conjured the Supreme to place on her head the crime of his self-destruction—she vowed to live to expiate his fault.

In the midst of such wretchedness as must soon have destroyed her, one thought alone brought consolation. She lived in the same country, breathed the same air as Raymond. His name as new Protector was on every tongue; his achievements, projects, and magnificence, the theme of every story. Nothing is so precious to a woman's heart as the glory and excellence of the one she loves; thus in the midst of every

horror Evadne reveled in his fame and prosperity. While her husband lived, she'd treated this feeling as a crime, repressed, repented of. When he died, the tide of love resumed its ancient flow, it deluged her soul with its tumultuous waves, and she gave herself up, a prey to its uncontrollable power.

But never, O, never, should Raymond see her in her degraded state! never behold her fallen from her pride of beauty, the poverty-stricken inhabitant of a garret, with a name which had become a reproach, and a weight of guilt on her soul. Still, though impenetrably veiled from each other, his public office permitted her into all his actions, his daily course of life, even his conversation. She allowed herself one luxury, and bought the newspapers every day, to feast on praise and news of the Protector. Not that this indulgence was painless. She read Perdita's name forever joined with his, and saw countless images of this faithful companion of all his labors and pleasures. They were continually together, and all reports vouched for their conjugal felicity. They, their Excellencies, met her eyes everywhere, the sight brewing an evil potion that poisoned her very blood.

It was in a paper that she'd seen the call for the national gallery design. The one she sent to the Protector combined and unified, by an effort of genius, her flawless taste with her remembrance of the great buildings she'd known in the east—the massive synagogues and mosques, the Acropolis and Delphi, the Hagia Sophia. Knowing her work chosen, she felt her triumph in the idea of bestowing, unknown and forgotten as

she was, a benefit upon him she loved; and with enthusiastic pride looked forward to her efforts' being immortalized in stone, knowing they'd go down to posterity stamped with Raymond's name. Drinking in her messenger's account of the Protector, insatiably, demanding each word, each look, she felt bliss in this communication with her beloved, one-sided as it was. The drawing itself became ineffably dear to her. He had seen it, and praised it; as she retouched it, each stroke of her pencil was like a chord of thrilling music; the work of her hand made a symphonic wave that bore to her the idea of a temple, raised to celebrate the deepest and most unutterable emotions of her soul. And there she had been, when Raymond's unforgettable voice came out of nowhere. Somehow she'd mastered her gush of feelings, to welcome him with quiet gentleness.

Pride and desire had struggled inside Evadne ever since. At length they compromised. She would see Raymond, since destiny had led him to her, and her constancy and devotion really did merit his friendship. But she refused to let him make her in any way financially dependent. Her mind was of uncommon strength; she could subdue her body to it, and suffer cold, hunger, misery, rather than concede to fortune a contested point. Alas! that in human nature such a high pitch of mental discipline, and disdainful negligence of nature itself, should not have been allied to the extreme of moral excellence! But the resolution that made her able to resist the pains of privation, sprang from her over-active passions; and the concentrated self-will of which this was a sign, was destined to

destroy even the idol, to preserve whose respect she submitted to an ongoing wretchedness.

Their meetings continued, and over time Evadne gave a more honest account of her story, admitting the stain her name had received in Greece, and her share of guilt in her husband's death. When Raymond answered with offers to clear her reputation, and demonstrate to the world her real patriotism, she told him that it was only through her present sufferings that she hoped for any relief to the stings of conscience; that, in her state of mind, diseased as he might think it, the need to work was the best medicine; and she got another promise from him, this time to avoid discussing her interests for one month—at the end of which, she might yield in part to his wishes.

She could not disguise from herself that she wanted Time to pause where it was. Any change from the present would separate her from Raymond. She saw him daily. His connection with Adrian and Perdita was never mentioned; he was to her a meteor, a companionless star, whose appearance at its appointed hour brought her felicity, and which, though it set, was never eclipsed. He came each day to her impoverished room, and his presence transformed it to a temple redolent with incense and sweetness, radiant with heaven's own light; he partook of her delirium. Like the lovers in many a tragedy, they built a wall between them and the world. Outside, a thousand harpies raved, the forces of remorse and misery, waiting for their signal to invade. Inside, peace, almost like the peace of innocence, lay anchored in still but treacherous waters, alongside reckless

blindness and delusive joy.

Thus, while Raymond remained wrapped up in visions of power and fame, while he looked forward to entire dominion over the elements and the culture, the territory of his own heart escaped his notice. And from that unthought-of source arose the mighty torrent that would overwhelm his will, and carry to the oblivious sea his fame, hope, and happiness.

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