

(16) INTER-CHAPTER

A Letter to Raymond from Evadne

At first, safe from famine and the grave, blanketed by Raymond's most tender care, lulled by that feeling of repose peculiar to convalescence, Evadne gave herself up to rapturous gratitude and love. But with health returned reflection. Where had he been, and why never with her, those nearly fatal weeks? With Greek subtlety did she begin to question him; but she formed her conclusions as to the motives for his absence in her own uncompromising way. Though unaware that the breach she'd occasioned between Raymond and Perdita was already irreparable, she judged the present situation to be widening it each day, and knew the result must be to destroy her lover's happiness. Remorse would have its fangs in his heart. There was only one thing she could do. She must—she would—part from him forever.

She left London immediately, keeping her destination unknown.

Her letter to Raymond offered no clues, only assurances. Yes, she was safe and in no danger of wanting the means of life; yes, she promised to preserve herself. He might find her

someday in a station not unworthy of her father's daughter. Then came, with the eloquence of despair and of unalterable love, a last farewell. It was impossible to guess at the whole of her plan.



A Letter to Raymond from Perdita

By December, my sister was still unable to calm her mind or subdue her thoughts to any regular train; she careened among hours of suspicion, self-reproach and blind serenity. Raymond and she seldom addressed each other, shunning explanation, each fearing to know what the other might say. He'd been limiting his time at the palace to those public occasions when his duties prevented his remaining alone with her.

Suddenly, his manners to Perdita changed. He appeared to looking for opportunities to bring about a return to kindness and intimacy between them. The tide of love towards her appeared to flow again; he spoke to her again and let her read his countenance. Which said, he could never forget how devoted he'd been to her once, nor how he'd made her the shrine and storehouse for his every thought and sentiment. He seemed to be holding back out of shame; yet he evidently wished to establish a renewal of confidence and affection.

Once Perdita recovered from her shock, she laid down an immediate plan of action for herself. Raymond's tokens of

returning love she received with gentleness; she did not shun his company; but against easy familiarity and more intimate painful discussion alike, she placed careful barriers. These, a mix of pride and shame kept him from surmounting. He grew impatient and began to show it. Perdita realized she must explain herself to him; she could not summon courage to speak, and preferred to write as follows:

Read this letter with patience, I entreat you. It will contain no reproaches. For what should I reproach you? Just let me explain my feelings. If we misunderstand one another less, maybe we can stop groping around for a way out of our life of the last few weeks.

I loved you—I love you—

I believed that you read my heart, and knew its devotion, its unalienable fidelity towards you.

Neither anger nor pride dictates these lines; but a feeling beyond, deeper, and more unalterable than either. My affections are wounded; it is impossible to heal them—cease then the vain endeavor, if indeed that way your endeavors tend. Forgiveness! Return! Idle words, these! I forgive the pain I endure; but the trodden path cannot be retraced.

Common affection might have been satisfied with commonplace treatment. But I never loved anyone but you. You arrived in my life as the embodied image of my fondest dreams, with your success, your celebrity. Love for you invested the world for me in enchanted light. No more poverty, no more trite, stale

repetition of old worn out days: I lived in a temple of the senses glorified by intensest devotion and rapture; I walked, a consecrated being, contemplating only your power, your excellence; our beloved Schiller writes of this—oh happy hours, when you read to me from Coleridge’s translation:

For O, you stood beside me, like my youth,
Transformed for me the real to a dream,
Clothing the palpable and familiar
With golden exhalations of the dawn.

The bloom has vanished from my life! There is no morning to this all-pervading night; no rising from love’s sunset. In those days the rest of the world was nothing to me. All other men—I never considered nor felt what they were, nor did I look on you as one of them. Separated from them; exalted in my heart; sole possessor of my affections; single object of my hopes; the best half of myself, that was you.

Is not love a divinity, because it never dies? Did not I appear sanctified, even to myself, because this love had my heart for its temple? I have gazed on you as you slept, melted even to tears, as the idea filled my mind that all I possessed lay cradled in those lineaments before me, idolized but subject to death and decay. Then I’d check the fears that thronged forth; I would not fear dying, because the emotions that linked us must be immortal.

Ah, Raymond, weren’t we happy? Did the sun ever shine on a couple that enjoyed its light with purer and more intense bliss? It

was not—it is not a common infidelity at which I repine. It is the disunion of an indivisible whole; it is the carelessness with which you shook off the mantle of election that you alone wore for me, and made yourself one among the many. Dream not to alter this.

I still don't fear death. I'd be happy to close my eyes and never open them again. And yet there is one fear—one I fear in everything. For in any state of being linked by the chain of memory with this life, how could happiness return? Even in Paradise, I fear, I must feel that your love was less enduring than the mortal beatings of my fragile heart, every pulse of which knells audibly, like the poet Byron's words. . .

The funeral note

Of love, deep buried, without resurrection

No—no—to my misery; for love extinct there is no resurrection!

I love you yet. Even yet, and forever, would I contribute all I possess to your welfare. On account of a tattling world, for the sake of my child—of our child—I'm willing to remain by your side, Raymond, share your fortunes, counsel and be counseled by you as I can. Shall it be thus? We are no longer lovers; nor can I call myself a friend to you or anyone—lost as I am, I have no thought to spare from my own wretched, engrossing self. But it will please me to see you each day! Yes, and to listen to the public praising you; to keep up your paternal love for our girl; to hear your voice; to know that I am near you, though you are no longer mine.

If you wish to break the chains that bind us, say the word, and it shall be done—I will take all the blame on myself, of harshness or unkindness, in the world's eye.

But, as I have said, I'd most like, at least for the present, to live under the same roof with you. Who knows? When the fever of my young life is spent; when placid age shall tame the vulture that devours me, friendship may come, love and hope being dead. My soul, inextricably linked to this perishable frame, could become lethargic and cold, much as my aging body must lose its youthful elasticity. Though now the words sound hollow and meaningless—then, wrinkled, gray-headed, with lackluster eyes, a woman tottering on the grave's extreme edge, then I may be—your affectionate and true friend,

PERDITA.

This letter was found among his possessions; I kept it later.

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