

(19) CHAPTER 10.

AFTER these events, it took a long time for the ones our friends had left behind to regain our composure. A moral tempest had wrecked the richly freighted vessel bearing us through life together, and we, remnants of a shrunken crew, were aghast at the losses and changes which we'd undergone.

To Idris his sister as to myself, Adrian's society was of the dearest and most necessary; we missed him terribly, as did all the children, whose regret over the loss of their kind playfellow was bitter. For myself, I'd been relying on his tutorship and help as I took my first serious steps towards a literary occupation. The delights of his mild philosophy, unerring reason, and enthusiastic friendship were not only the best ingredients in my progress, they were the exalted spirit of our circle itself. We needed him, and could never stop wondering when (not to mention, whether) he'd return.

Fairly quickly, Perdita became almost a shadow of herself. With Clara she'd returned to us from London, her power and rank gone with her husband's Protectorate. She was furious, resentful, grief-stricken, all at once. Raymond she could not forgive, she blamed him for all her misery; at the same time, she

obsessed over his welfare, consuming every account of his toils and dangers, worried day and night. Now that he was distant and exposed to peril, what happened to him was her foremost care—not that she would ever call him back from harm. She could never take him back; their union was former, irreparable; which made an anguish of its own. Before he and Adrian left, while there was still time, I'd tried everything to convince her that she must talk to Raymond and try at all costs to make him stay; but she had refused—not unless time could be reversed, she'd said, and the past erased along with his falsehood. Thus with stern pride she let him go, though her very heartstrings cracked, and all sense that life was worth living seemed to go with him. Characteristically, she sought solitude over our happier family hours, and made lonely musings, interminable wanderings, and solemn music her only pastimes. Even Clara was neglected; while I, her first and always fast friend, saw reserve grow between us, as my sister shut her heart against all tenderness.

For the whole household's sake, it seemed best to get away from Windsor. My proposal for a long trip to the Lake District being accepted, we lingered for weeks at my native Ulswater, among scenes dear from a thousand associations. From the north of England we lengthened our tour into Scotland, saw Loch Katrine and Loch Lomond, then crossed to Ireland, where we spent several more weeks in the neighborhood of Killarney. The change of scene seemed to do my sister all the good I'd hoped; she was calmer, gentler, more sociable by the

time we returned from our travels. But as soon as we were back, so were all the old associations—she couldn't forget. At the first sight of our Castle, she began to break down. Forest, ferns, lawns, breezes, bolts of sunlight; silvery-blue glimpses of the ancient Thames through trees that flashed like memory's very pathway; every atom of earth, air, and wave at Windsor greeted her in chorus and overwhelmed her with plaintive regret.

I was glad to be back, for I'd begun to miss my study and my books. Since Adrian had drawn me from my all-encompassing wilderness to his own paradise of order and beauty, that unforgettable summer, I had been wedded to literature. Books: with the world in its present state, no one, I felt, could call their faculties developed, their moral principles large enough or liberal, without an extensive acquaintance with books. To me, they took the place of an active career, of ambition, of involvement with those palpable excitements necessary to the multitude. The collation of philosophical opinions, the study of historical facts, the acquirement of languages—these were my recreation and the serious aim of my life, as well. As I've indicated, I turned author myself. My productions however were fairly minor; they were confined to biographies of favorite historical characters; I was drawn to those whom I believed to have been traduced, or about whom clung obscurity and doubt.

No one ever lived who enjoyed the pleasures of composition more intensely than I. Music, my inspiration, was partly the cause. From the woods, the majestic temple of nature, where I sat and wrote to the solemn music of the waving branches, I'd

take my way back to the Castle's vast halls and panoramic views of a fertile England spread beneath our regal mount; and there, in the musical household, inspiring strains were always to be heard. Whenever I felt my mental energies lagging, some melody would lift them, inspire them, and even permit them, methought, to penetrate the last veil of nature and her God; at times the beauties I perceived lay at the limits of what human capacity could see or understand. On music's wings, my ideas seemed to quit their mortal dwelling in my head and fly outward toward their own source in the skies of thought itself; I saw the creation filled with new glory, and rousing sublime imagery that would otherwise have slept unseen, voiceless, showed itself to me. Then I'd hasten to my desk, and try to weave the new-found webs with words to give them firmness, texture, brilliant colors. The fashioning of the material I'd leave to calmer moments.

As my authorship increased, I acquired new sympathies and pleasures. I had found another and a valuable link to enchain me to my fellow-creatures; my point of sight was extended, and the inclinations and capacities of all human beings became deeply interesting to me. I felt as it might to be a king; they were my people, and posterity my heirs. My thoughts were gems to enrich the universal treasure house of intellectual possessions; each sentiment was a precious gift I bestowed on the future. Let not these aspirations be attributed to vanity! Unarticulated even in my own mind, they filled my soul, exalted my thoughts, gave me an enthusiastic glow, and led me out of the obscure path I'd

walked alone, into the noon-bright highway of common humanity. I was made a citizen of the world, a candidate for immortal honors, and, yes, an eager aspirant to other people's praise and sympathy.

I describe a time in my life so different from the present moment; yet often the feelings as I write are not so unlike. Then, it was the pleasure I took in literature, the discipline of mind I derived from it, that made me eager to recommend the same course to Perdita. Clearly, she needed something to fill her hours now that we were home again—something satisfying enough to make her half forget her sorrows. If not writing, then take up music again, learn a language: she rejected all suggestions, saying she lacked the concentration. Her education had been minimal; though she'd managed, in her lonely cottage days, under the elegant and cultivated Evadne's tutelage, to develop a near-genius for painting. But now, returned to Windsor, at each attempt to paint her hand trembled, her eyes filled with tears; she threw aside her pallet, abandoned her easel. Too many memories! It was the same with everything she tried. Predictably, her too-idle mind preyed upon itself almost to madness.

Though she now took pleasure in being around me, Idris, Clara and the boys—her child especially enjoyed her tenderness and care in abundant measure—this was a kind of surface calm. Neither grief, philosophy, nor love could make Perdita think with mildness of Raymond's dereliction. In contrast to the weeks that had followed her arrival from London, she refused to

read any communications from Greece. All she wanted was to be told when we'd had news, and whether our two wanderers were still alive and well; more than that, we weren't supposed to say. A more painful curb was the law she'd made among us never to mention Raymond's name in front of her. It was curious and sad to see that even little Clara obeyed, and never spoke of the father she dearly loved; more than sad, it was painful to watch untimely care turn a disposition from its born light-hearted mirthfulness to moods less natural and more reserved. This lovely child was nearly eight years old, graceful as one of the bounding fawns of the forest outside. Her sweet complexion seemed the work of a celestial portraitist; all the troubled thought she wore on her young brow dated from her father's departure. Children, unadepts in language, seldom find words to express their thoughts; how the late events had impressed themselves on her mind, we could not tell. But certainly Clara had made deep observations, while noting in silence the changes happening around her. Never mentioning her father to Perdita, she appeared half afraid to speak of him at all. I tried, unsuccessfully, to draw her out on the subject and perhaps dispel the gloom that hung about her ideas concerning him. Yet each foreign post-day the little girl watched for the arrival of letters; she knew the post mark; she watched me as I read. More than once I found her poring over illustrated articles on the Greek war in one of our newspapers.

For her beloved daughter's sake, along with her own, Perdita must take herself in hand—so I told her, exhorting,

expostulating. Though never bookish, my sister had always been brainy, perceptive, creative. If she had something of interest to do, a productive intellectual pursuit, it must soon become easier to reconcile with her present reality, and speak both openly and honestly again with her child. What's more, if she needed to forgive Raymond somewhat for this to happen, so be it: Forgive him. But she rejected all such counsels. The loss of love had swallowed her whole. She grieved with an anguish that exiled all smiles from her lips; grief drew lines across her brow and down her beautiful cheeks.

But in human beings, the world had a strange animal. Forty-horse power of forceful reasoning couldn't budge my sister from her fixed resentment; yet change she did. If the time for forgiveness wasn't yet, at least the grip in which she held her sense of injury began to loosen. Each day seemed to alter the nature of her suffering; from the unbroken black of mourning, her soul appeared to brighten its styles step by step. Music fed her starving intellect and aired out her melancholy thoughts with its variety. And in the books I'd pressed upon her, the productions of the wise, she discovered medicine for her sorrow. Reading not, as many did, for the mere sake of filling up time, Perdita read in search of truth, to improve her understanding. The gentle discipline of good books inevitably softened her heart and improved her disposition. She began to realize, that amidst all her newly acquired knowledge, her own character which she'd believed she knew through and through had emerged as *terra incognita*—pathless, wild, uncharted.

Erringly and strangely she began the task of self-examination. She condemned herself at first. Then, as she weighed her own good qualities anew, she began to balance with fairer scales the shades of good and evil in her life. I who longed beyond words to restore her to the happiness it was still in her power to enjoy, watched with anxiety the result of these internal proceedings.

Here matters stood when, after the lapse of more than a year, Adrian returned from Greece. Only with his arrival did we learn the alarming truth, that he'd been seriously wounded. His mind was unaffected, though, and his story sobered us in our joy at seeing him again.

He and Raymond had arrived in Athens at a time of truce between the Turks and Greeks, one of those truces that treats a cease-fire like a restful nap. Both sides were renewing their energies. From its military stronghold on the southern Peloponnese, in the Morea, Greece had pushed north across the Aegean Sea to take back Thrace and Macedonia from Mahometan control, actions which had led its armies nearly to the gates of Istanbul. In the meantime, economic diplomacy did its work; the country's extensive commercial relations gave most of Europe an interest in a Greek success. Obviously, the Turks would meet these signs of enemy strength with an immediate resolve to crush that enemy; soon, using a limitless supply of troops from Asia, and all the best weapons, ships, and military means that wealth and power could command, they must try. Our exiles found the Greeks preparing to make a vigorous national resistance. There was universal conscription, and the

parents left at home gave their costliest ornaments to fill the war funds; like the Spartan mothers, they sent their children off to conquer or die. Leading the Athenian division, a post that ranked second only to commander-in-chief, was Lord Raymond. His talents and courage were remembered with high esteem by all the Greeks, but Athens had claimed him for her own and awarded him that honor. The Earl of Windsor became a volunteer under his friend.

“It’s fine,” said Adrian now, “to chat about war in pleasant surroundings, and fun to stay up past midnight celebrating victories that have caused thousands of our fellow-creatures to leave in pain the sweet air of their Mother Earth. No one can deny that I support the Greek cause; I know and feel its necessity; it is beyond doubt or comparison a good cause. I have defended it with my sword, and was willing that my spirit should be breathed out in its defense; life is worth less than freedom, and the Greeks do well to defend their privilege unto death. But let us not deceive ourselves. The Turks are human beings; they feel every wound and spasm in mind or body as keenly as a Greek; our own limbs and hearts are no more sensitive.”

He’d last seen action in a victory we’d read of, over a fortified town: the Turks resisted to the last, until the Greek troops entered by assault. The rest, newspapers hadn’t told us. Adrian’s voice continued, “Every breathing creature within the walls was massacred. Could you think that with the shrieks of violated innocence and helpless infancy coming from every side, I felt in less than every nerve the cries of my fellow beings as they

suffered? They were men and women and children, before they were Mahometans, and when they rise turbanless and naked from the grave with the rest of us, in what except their good or evil actions will they be the better or worse than we?

“I saw two soldiers fighting over a girl, a couple of wretches whose brutal appetites had been excited by her beauty and fine clothes; perhaps good men among their families, they’d been changed to devils by the moment’s fury. An old man, decrepit, bald and silver-bearded, he might have been her grandfather, interposed to save her, and got his skull cleaved by a battle axe. Now I rushed to her defense, but rage made the soldiers blind and deaf; they couldn’t see that I was in Christian dress, couldn’t hear what I was saying—words were weapons too blunt, while war cried havoc, and murder gave fit echo. One of the men, enraged at my interference, struck me with his bayonet in the side, and I fell senseless.

“This wound will probably shorten my life, having shattered a frame already weak. But I am content to die. I have learnt in Greece that one person, more or less, is of small importance, while enough living bodies remain to fill up the ranks of the soldiery when they get thin. An individual’s identity may be overlooked, so long as the muster roll maintains its numbers. All this has a different effect upon Raymond. He’s able to contemplate the ideal of war, while I am sensible only to its realities. He’s a soldier, a general. He can influence the bloodthirsty war-dogs, while I resist their propensities vainly. Of the National Assembly during the French Revolution, Edmund Burke

wrote, as I remember: ‘In all bodies. those who will lead must also, in a considerable degree, follow.’ I cannot follow; for I do not sympathize in their dreams of massacre and glory—to follow and to lead in such a career, is the natural bent of Raymond’s mind. He’s always successful, and all signs point to his being able to acquire high name and station for himself, while at the same time securing liberty and a probably extended empire to the Greeks.”

Perdita’s state of mind wasn’t helped by this account. “Yes!” she cried. “He can be great and happy without me. Would that I had a career of my own! Would that I could load some nice new-built little boat with all my hopes, energies, and desires, and launch it forth into the ocean of life, headed for one attainable point after another, with ambition or pleasure at the helm! But adverse winds detain me on shore; like Ulysses, I sit at the water’s edge and weep. Only my boat remains unbuilt. My nerveless hands can neither fell the trees, nor smooth the planks.”

As these words show, Adrian’s return saw my sister’s thoughts take a melancholy plunge. Yet his presence did the immediate good of breaking through our unnatural law of silence. It wasn’t long before Perdita got used to the sound of Raymond’s name again. Love returned with familiarity, and soon she’d listen avidly to all the accounts of his achievements. Clara too got rid of her restraint. Adrian and she were old play-fellows; and now, as they walked or rode together, he’d yield to

her pleas and tell, for the hundredth time, some favorite story of her father's bravery, munificence, or justice.

The daily news from the battlegrounds gushed with optimism. At Windsor, we followed every exhilarating detail of Raymond's heroics, his perpetual rise in the Greeks' estimation. He himself wrote briefly now and then, letters proving how engrossed he was by the interests of his adopted country—which would have been happy, he told us, to keep the territory already won, sign a treaty, and go back to their normal life, making money; but the Turkish invasion roused a patriotic resistance. A string of victories instilled a spirit of conquest. The Greeks had begun to look on Istanbul as their own—Istanbul, which they would call Byzantium again.

The battle of Makri was fought to decide the fate of Islam in the region. The Mahometans were defeated and driven entirely from the country west of the river Hebrus. Raymond was conspicuous for his conduct and choice of position in the encounter. First he led the charge of cavalry, then he pursued the fugitives across the plains of Thrace all the way to the banks of the Hebrus—a tranquil river, beside which his favorite horse was found grazing. Makri was a sanguinary battle, the loss of the Turks apparently irreparable. The many Greeks strewn upon the bloody field lay nearly forgotten, a nameless crowd, as far from consideration as the value of a victory that had cost so much—their second-in-command—Raymond.

Although his death seemed likely, he was nowhere to be found among the fallen thousands. Had the Turks taken him

prisoner? Where was their ransom demand, in that case? Or, finding themselves possessed at one and the same time of so illustrious a captive, and the enemy fighter most hated and feared among the Turkish ranks, had they resolved to satisfy their cruelty rather than their avarice and commit a secretive act of cold-blooded murder?

In England, where Raymond was far from forgotten, his one-time people clung eagerly to every hope that he'd survived. Since his sensational abdication, the narrow views of those in office were constantly contrasted with his political vision's magnificence and boldness—he'd understood how to change the whole system—and the end of his Protectorate was referred to with sorrow. A figure of perpetual interest and excitement, a favorite child of fortune, whose military glory cast his contemporaries in shadow, whose untimely loss eclipsed the world: this picture of Raymond dominated the day. His fate was on every mind.

At last, in May, the results of its inquiries were reported by the British ministry at Istanbul. Raymond had been captured, alive, but grievously wounded, and brought to that city. His present condition was unknown. Should he be found to have survived their notoriously cruel treatment of prisoners, his release would be demanded of the Turks.

The instant she heard this, my sister—who had never for a moment believed Raymond was dead—resolved to go to Greece immediately; she must arrive before the captive's return. Her duty to help nurse Raymond back to health was

absolute. Our counter-reasoning and persuasion were wasted; she would endure no hindrance, no delay. In our little circle, we'd long held it as a truth, that if someone could be turned from a desperate and emotional purpose by the force of argument alone, then it was the right thing to talk them out of it; for if they were so easily dissuaded, neither the motive nor the end were of sufficient force to bear them through the inevitable obstacles. If, on the contrary, they were proof against all expostulation, this very steadiness was an omen of success; and it became the duty of those who loved them to assist in smoothing the bumps from their path. So it was that, finding Perdita immovable, we set about discussing the best way to get her to Athens.

She couldn't go alone to a country where she had no friends, where she might arrive only to hear dreadful news which must overwhelm her with grief and remorse. Adrian, whose health had always been weak, was suffering more than ever from the effects of his wound and couldn't possibly travel. Idris could not endure to leave her brother in this state; nor was it right either that the two of us should quit or take along a young family for a journey like this. In the end, I resolved to accompany Perdita. The separation from my Idris was painful—but necessity reconciled us to it in some degree: necessity and the hope of saving Raymond and restoring him to my sister, and to happiness.

No delay was to ensue. Within forty-eight hours, we'd set off. The weather was clear for the season; we were promised a

fine voyage. Embarked on the open sea, we saw with delight the receding shore of Britain, and the well-filled sails above us. Light, curling waves sped us southward, and old Ocean smiled at the freight of love and hope committed to his charge; gentling his tempestuous plains with a fond stroke, he smoothed our path. Day and night a wind right aft gave steady impulse to our keel—nor did rough gale, or treacherous sand, or destructive rock interpose an obstacle between my sister and the land which was to restore her to her cherished first beloved. . .

Her dear heart's confessor—a heart within that heart.

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