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could she refuse? But she did refuse; much to his surprise, something to his annoyance, and more to his contempt. She had not a philosophic soul; she was no better than other women, then, in this respect; that she allowed an idiotic fancy to usurp the place of some more rational feeling, which was all that philosophy needed to enable two human beings to live placidly together.

He returned to Hapsbury that afternoon, and Assunta was left to the mercy of Mr. Walbrooke. What that mercy was may be gathered from the fact that he was closeted with her for upwards of an hour; after which I was unable to get speech of her, for she pleaded fatigue to retire to her bed. The next morning I received news of my father's serious illness, which called me suddenly to London; but I managed to have a few minutes' conversation alone with Assunta in the library before my departure. She looked sallow and worn, poor child, that morning—the world and Mr. Ridgway would have said almost plain. To me she never seemed more lovable and interesting. She sat down wearily on one of the great leather chairs, and leaned her head on her hand. Then she told me something of what had passed between the master of the house and herself, and of what she felt to be the peculiar and terrible difficulty of her present position.

"He is so kind in his own way—he has been more like a relation to me than a master—that when he tells me how fatal it would be to all his views for Harry that we should marry, I feel as if I were a monster of ingratitude to oppose him. If I could be persuaded that it was really for Harry's benefit to give me up, I would show him the example—cost me what

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it might, Mr. Luttrell. It is this breaks my heart. I have not slept all night, thinking what I ought to do. Mr. Walbrooke says I am mistaken in fancying I have much influence over Harry; and, alas! I almost feel as if he were right. I am afraid it cannot be very great, since he can be swept hither and thither by every impulse of the moment. I ask myself, 'Shall I not be as a millstone round his neck? Will the day not come when he will regret having married the penniless foundling?'"

"Never; unless he do so precipitately," I replied at once. "And this I am sure you will not consent to. You have but one course, both of you: to try and wear out the squire's patience. It is a case of two to one; for all this family are so attached to you that I am sure they will not hear of your leaving them."

She coloured, and with a sad little smile said, "Unless it is, as the maids say, 'to better myself,' or what Mr. Walbrooke considers is to better me. For that he is urgent—nay, positively angry at my rejection of wealth and social position. What are they all to me without Harry?"

"Is it final," I asked, "this rejection?"

"Final," she replied; and no more passed between us on the subject. We returned again to Harry. She bitterly deplored his having by this fresh outrage yet further incensed his uncle. "Mr. Walbrooke says that until I marry, or that Harry consents to give me up, he must not return here. That is hard, is it not, Mr. Luttrell?—to separate Harry and his uncle, who has been like a father to him? My darling boy will never give me up, I know that, but I cannot be his ruin—I, who hoped to save him; for it will be ruin if this

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quarrel between him and his uncle continues. Mr. Walbrooke candidly told me that he would never forgive Harry's marrying against his consent. He said, 'My nephew must marry a woman of some social weight, to lift him up, instead of dragging him down.' It sounds worldly and heartless to me, Mr. Luttrell, but perhaps it is true, for all that. If I only knew what was right. If I only knew what was best for my darling!"

The sad eyes were full of tears, but they did not fall.

"Will you write to me, dear Miss Fleming?" I asked, with as steady a voice as I could command. "I think you know that I am your true friend, as I am Harry's, and that I shall always give you such advice as I should to a dear sister. My last word is, 'Do nothing rashly.'"

She promised to write, and thanked me warmly; then we parted. Nothing could be kinder than Mr. Walbrooke's farewell. "You must come to us again in June, Luttrell, whether Harry is here or not—whether he is here or *not*," he repeated, doggedly. "The young man's obstinacy is such that unless circumstances occur—which I am hopeful they may—to force him into submission, it is very probable he may continue to put himself into opposition to me. And as long as he does so, he will not come to the Grange. But, remember, we shall be very glad to see you. There is that Sir Joshua, you know, which you have begun to copy—you must return to finish it."

But the copy of Sir Joshua remains unfinished to this day; and, possibly, still adorns some attic at the Grange. I have never seen it or the Grange since that January morning in 1827.

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CHAPTER VII.

My poor father's was a long illness, and I was constantly in attendance on him for many weeks. He died in March, and about the same time I learnt, indirectly, that Mr. Fleming was dead, leaving a widow and four children in very poor circumstances. I had received one or two letters from Assunta, giving a sad account of her tormented state of mind, Harry's name being now tabooed in the family circle, all communications between him and the Squire being of the briefest and driest character, and Mr. Ridgway being now a more constant guest than ever. Then came an interval when I heard nothing from the Grange, being myself too busily and painfully occupied to write more than the brief announcement of my father's death. I had only one letter from Harry, and that was not very satisfactory. It was, indeed, fuller than ever of his passionate attachment to Assunta; but of this I needed no assurance. I should have been better pleased to learn that it was producing some permanent effect on his life and character; but as to the one he was silent, and that the reckless impetuosity of the other was uncontrolled as ever was clear from the violent terms in which he wrote of his uncle. I had, moreover, the opportunity of learning through a friend, whose brother was at Oxford, that young Walbrooke's efforts at steadiness were spasmodic at best. He belonged to a fast set, and though he sometimes absented himself from their "wines" for a few days, the least vexation, or, it might be, the devil within him, unaided by any circumstances from without, drove him to those festive

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boards, from which he was too often seen reeling home in the early morning light.

All this was painful enough to me, and doubly so, as I did not see any hopeful termination to the existing state of things. In April I wrote to Assunta, but of course abstained from any allusion to what I had heard of Harry. I wrote but a few lines, asking for news of her; and some days later I received the following reply:—

"*April 20th*, 1827.

"DEAR MR. LUTTRELL,—

"THANK you for your kind letter. We have both had a heavy sorrow since I last wrote to you; added to which I have suffered much in other ways. You ask me to tell you everything about myself, or I should not think of intruding my own troubles upon you so soon. Dear Mr. Luttrell, there are griefs far worse than the death of those we love. Henry's conduct is driving me to despair. He has been sent away from Oxford—'rusticated' I think they call it—for a time, in consequence of some wild outbreaks. What will become of him? The doors of this house, his natural home, are shut against him; he will not go to Lady Horton's, who, it seems, spoke disparagingly of me when he was there in the winter. Alas! you see, on every side, I am the barrier between him and his relations; and Mr. Walbrooke's great kindness to me makes it all the worse. He has given me fifty pounds to send to poor dear Mrs. Fleming, and has promised to pay for little Charlie's schooling. Why cannot he rest satisfied with these acts of true benevolence, without trying to force me into a marriage with one man, while my heart is another's? Dear Mr. Luttrell, I have been

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