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DUMARESQ'S DAUGHTER

A Novel

BY

GRANT ALLEN

**AUTHOR OF
'IN ALL SHADES,' 'THIS MORTAL COIL,' 'THE TENTS OF SHEM,' ETC.**

**IN THREE VOLUMES
VOL. III.**

London

CHATTO & WINDUS, PICCADILLY

1891

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DUMARESQ'S DAUGHTER.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

QUESTIONS OF INHERITANCE.

About the same time, Reginald Mansel, Esquire, of Petherton Episcopi, happening to be up in town on private business, had occasion to call on his father's old friend, that distinguished sailor, Admiral John Antony Rolt, of the Senior United Service.

'So the heiress lives down your way?' Admiral Rolt observed, puckering up his small eyes at the end of some desultory conversation—and always eager, after his kind, to improve every possible source of information. 'Miss Psyche Dumaresq, I mean; precious odd name, Psyche; rather pride myself, as an old salt, on knowing how to pronounce it. There was a *Psyche* in the Navy List once, I remember, a wooden gunboat, on the Pacific station, when I commanded the *Skylark*; though *she* went to pieces at last in the China seas—poor M'Nab sank down to Davy Jones's locker in her—and was never put together again. Smart craft, very; and *this* Miss Psyche's a tidy young lady, too, I'm told; taut, neat, and clipper-rigged. Well, she comes into all Charlie Linnell's money.'

'Impossible!' Mansel answered with promptitude. 'I've never heard a word of it. She's a great friend of my wife's, and a very nice girl in her way, no doubt; and Linnell fell in love with her: but she wouldn't accept him. He's left her nothing. If he had, I'm sure we'd have been the first to hear of it.'

'Well, it's a very odd case,' the Admiral continued, pursing up his little pig's eyes even smaller than before—'a very odd case as ever I heard of. She isn't to know of it for another year, but I'm sure I'm right. I've been talking it over to-day with Linnell's half-brother Frank—the parson in Northumberland; and Frank doesn't quite see his way out of it. Precious awkward for the parson, there's no denying it.'

Reginald Mansel started.

'Why, I thought the half-brother was dead!' he exclaimed in surprise. 'Killed in a railway accident. My wife certainly told me so.'

'Ah! that's just where it is,' the Admiral answered, rubbing his fat hands with profound gusto. 'As fine a muddle as ever you saw in your life. A perfect godsend for the Court of Chancery. Killed sure enough: so he was—in the newspapers: smashed to atoms in the Doncaster collision, they reported at first. You remember the accident—pig-iron and so forth. But, you see, when they pick out a lot of bodies, pell-mell, from a jolly good smash, and stack 'em along in the hospital, they're not so very particular, just at the first beginning, whether any one fellow among 'em happens to be still breathing, or whether he doesn't. So they telegraphed up to London post haste, in the list of killed, "Reverend Francis Austen Linnell, Vicar of Thingumbobcum-Whatyoumaycallit, Northumberland." Correspondents are in such a precious hurry nowadays to supply the very latest news to their particular print, that you can't expect them to hang dawdling about in a ward, on the watch till the breath's well out of a man's body,' And the Admiral chuckled low to himself musically.

'Then you mean to say the fellow isn't dead, after all?' Mansel exclaimed, astonished. 'It was a mistaken rumour!'

'Dead! my dear sir; why, I tell you, he was lunching with me at the Pothouse—you know the Pothouse? my other club: not its official name—only this very morning. And a prettier muddle than those papers made of it you never heard. It was three whole days before they plucked up courage to announce their little error, and state that the Reverend Frank was not quite gone, only seriously wounded. Meanwhile, Sir Austen and the painter man went off in a hurry to Khartoum without seeing the correction, and to the day of their death never heard at all that the parson had turned up well and alive again. It was really most unfortunate. Frank Linnell believes those papers have done him out of all the Linnell money—Sir Austen's and the other man's. Only, you see, he doesn't quite know how he can go to work to get it all back again. It's a ticklish job, I admit; but I wouldn't give much, all the same—with a parson against her—for Miss Psyche Dumaresq's chances of the property.'

'Surely, though, if Linnell left his money by will to Miss Dumaresq, she'd get it, in any case,' Mansel objected incredulously.

The Admiral stared hard at him, and smiled a knowing smile.

'You don't understand the glorious uncertainty of the law,' he answered, enchanted. Then, with all the intense enjoyment of the male old woman, he proceeded to detail to his country acquaintance the whole long story of the Linnell family, and their various complications—*Bellerophon*, *Cockatrice*, Sally Withers, the Dean's daughter, and the rest of it—exactly as it all envisaged itself in full to his own lively and by no means too scrupulous imagination. Mansel listened with profound attention; but when the Admiral had finished he ventured to put in cautiously:

'Still, I don't quite understand how all this can interfere with Psyche's inheritance of Charles Linnell's money—if, as you say, he's really left it to her.'

'Why, here's the point, don't you see,' the Admiral answered cheerily, buttonholing his listener and enforcing his argument with one fat uplifted forefinger. 'Charles Linnell, as I understand, came up to town from your place, Petherton, on the very day after his half-brother Frank was declared dead in the morning papers. So far, so good. But that same night, as I learn from one of the witnesses to the deed, he made his will, and Sir Austen signed it—said will leaving everything he died possessed of to the young lady, unknown, of the name of Psyche. Now, Frank Linnell's contention is that Sir Austen and Charles arrived at an understanding, *under* the impression,' and the Admiral brought down his fat forefinger on his knee, to enforce his point—'*under* the impression that he, Frank, was dead and done for; which of course, in actual fact, he wasn't. Therefore, he argues, the will is accordingly null and void, and he himself ought to come into the money.'

'But how can he,' Mansel inquired, smiling, 'if he's really illegitimate? By law, if I'm rightly informed, he and Charles Linnell are not considered to be even related.'

The Admiral shrugged his shoulders and pursed his mouth firmly.

'Well, I haven't quite mastered all the ins and the outs of it,' he answered with candour. 'It's a trifle confused for an old salt like me; but I believe the learned counsel who understand the law get at it something like this, d'ye see. It all depends upon which of the two, Sir Austen or Charles Linnell, was killed first at Khartoum. If Charles was killed first, then the Reverend Frank asserts—you understand—this will being null and void, owing to unsound mind, errors of fact, want of proper disposing intent, and other causes—that Sir Austen, as next-of-kin and sole heir-at-law, inherited the pill-money. For that, he relies upon Charles Linnell's legitimacy. But on the other hand, Charles Linnell being now well out of the way, and unable to prove or disprove anything, the Reverend Frank also goes in, as an alternative, for claiming that he's actually legitimate himself, and denying proof of Miss Sally Violet's marriage. On that point, there's nobody now who can bring up good evidence. So he stands to win either way. If he's legitimate himself, he's a baronet anyhow, and he comes into the reversion of Thorpe Manor. If he's not legitimate, he's no baronet, to be sure, and the entail fails; but the fun of it is, he gets Sir Austen's personal estate, for all that, through his mother, the Dean's daughter, who was Sir Austen's second cousin, twice removed, or something of the sort, and whose case is covered by Sir Austen's settlements. The old father did that—the Peninsular man, you know—after the bigamy came out. He insisted upon putting in Frank Linnell by name in the settlements, as heir to the personalty, irrespective of the question of his birth altogether. And in the personalty, the Reverend Frank now asserts, he reckons in Charles Linnell's pill-money.'

Mansel drew his hand across his brow confusedly.

'It *is* a trifle mixed,' he answered with a puzzled air. 'But it's decidedly clever. I should think it ought to prove a perfect mine of wealth to the Inner Temple.'

'Mine of wealth!' the Admiral echoed with a snort of delight. 'I believe you, my boy. Golconda or Kimberley isn't in it by comparison. The whole estate won't cover the law charges. For, you see, there's the lovely question to decide beforehand, *did* Sir Austen or his cousin die first? And till that's settled, nothing fixed can be done about the property. Well, Frank Linnell doesn't mean to let the question drop. He has a twelvemonth to spare, during which time he's going to work like a nigger to prevent the lady with the classical name from coming into the property. Of course you won't mention a word of this to her? I tell it you in confidence. That's all right. Thank you. So Frank thinks of going to Egypt and up the Nile this very next winter as ever is, to see if he can collect any evidence anywhere as to which was killed first—his half-brother Charles, or his cousin Sir Austen. And between you and me, sir—if only you knew these Egyptian fellows as well as I do—the Reverend Frank must be a much more simple-minded person than I take him to be if he doesn't get at least half a dozen green-turbaned, one-eyed sheikhs to swear by the beard of the Prophet, till all's blue, that they saw Charles Linnell with their own eyes lying dead at Khartoum, in any position that seems most convenient, while Sir Austen sat in a respectful attitude, shedding a decorous tear or two above his mangled body. An Egyptian, sir,' the

Admiral continued, blinking his small eyes even more vigorously than was his wont—'an Egyptian would swear away his own father's life, bless your soul! for a tin piastre.'

'Then you think whatever evidence is wanted will be duly forthcoming?' Mansel asked dubiously.

'Think? I don't think. I know it, unless the Reverend Frank's a born fool. But even after he's got it, don't you see, there's a lot more still left to prove. Yet even so, he stands to play a winning card either way. If he's legitimate, he's a baronet of Thorpe Manor; and if he isn't, he's heir all the same to Sir Austen's personalty.' And the Admiral chuckled.

Mansel looked at him with a curious air of suspended judgment.

'After all,' he said slowly, in his critical way, 'you're taking a great deal for granted, aren't you? How on earth do we know, when one comes to think of it, that either of the Linnells is really dead at all? How on earth do we know they aren't still cooped up in Khartoum, as O'Donovan was in Merv, you recollect, and that they mayn't turn up unexpectedly some day to defeat all these hasty surmises and guesses? You can't prove a man's will till you've first proved he's dead; and who's to say that either of the Linnells is dead, when one comes to face it?'

The Admiral threw back his head and laughed internally.

'Dead!' he answered, much amused. 'Of course they're dead. As dead as mutton! As dead as a door-nail! As dead as Julius Cæsar! Do you think the Mahdi's people, when once they got in, would leave a Christian soul alive in Khartoum? My dear fellow, you don't know these Egyptians and Soudanese as well as I do—I was out for a year on the Red Sea station. They'd cut every blessed throat in the whole garrison! There's not a Christian soul alive to-day in Khartoum!'

CHAPTER XXIX.

FRESH ACQUAINTANCES.

It was with a feeling very nearly akin to relief that Psyche found herself, some six weeks later, in a pretty little bedroom in a Moorish villa on the sun-smitten hills of Mustapha Supérieur.

'Why, I know the very place for you,' Geraldine Maitland exclaimed with delight, when Psyche informed her on her return to Petherton that medical authority, two deep, had prescribed Algiers for their joint indispositions. 'A dear little *pension* on the Mustapha slope. It's as clean as a pin, and just like a home; and it's kept by an English officer's widow, a Mrs. Holliday. It's not so very dear, either,' she hastened to add, seeing Psyche's face growing faintly incredulous. 'They'd take in friends of ours at special rates. Mamma has sent them such lots of boarders.'

And indeed the rates, as quoted to Haviland Dumaresq some days later, in Mrs. Holliday's letter, were very special—very special indeed; for a reason which Geraldine Maitland knew best, and which she took care to keep to herself very strictly. 'I should feel *greatly* obliged, however,' Mrs. Holliday wrote, underlining the *greatly* with two feminine bars, 'if you would have the kindness to refrain from mentioning these terms I quote to any other of the visitors at the villa, as they are considerably below usual charges, to meet the wishes of my friend Mrs. Maitland.'

Oh, the journey south! The rest and change of it! The delight of getting away from the Wren's Nest, with its endless obtrusive memories of Linnell! The calm of travel—the momentary oblivion! Paris, Dijon, the Rhone, Marseilles! For twenty-four hours Psyche almost forgot herself.

The dear little *pension* on the Mustapha slope, too, how thoroughly it deserved Geraldine Maitland's judicious commendation! It was very pretty and very home-like. After thirty hours' tossing on the faithless Mediterranean—bluest but most treacherous of all known seas—and that long drive up the dusty road through the vivid town from the quays at Algiers, Psyche was right glad to rest herself at last in that dainty little bedroom at the Villa des Orangers, and to look out of the arcaded Moorish window at the palms and aloes that diversified the garden.

True enough, as Dr. Godichau had confidently predicted, her eyesight came back to her for the nonce at a bound. Wisdom was justified of all her children. Psyche had seen everything all the way up through those crowded streets: she saw everything still with perfect distinctness in the arcades and gardens of that quaint old *pension*.

It was an antique Moorish country-house, all whitewashed walls and horseshoe arches, planted on the side of a tiny ravine, near the very summit of an Algerian hill, some six hundred feet above a deep-blue bay of that treacherous and all too beautiful Mediterranean. Through the jealously-barred and grated windows of a deep-set chamber in what was once the harem of the old Turkish proprietor, Psyche's eye just caught faint glimpses westward of a feathery date-palm, a jungle of loquat-trees, and a ruddy hillside of basking sandstone, red as the familiar South Hams of Devonshire. Beyond, the ravine displayed in further perspective a tangled cane-brake, a steep road down whose tortuous slope an old Arab countryman was defiling slowly, cross-legged on his pannier-laden donkey, and a picturesque wine factory, whose snow-white archways and low stories were all gracefully pinked out along their constructive lines with decorative string-courses of Oriental tile-work. A peep of the dim blue Atlas to eastward across a misty plain completed the view from the windows of that quaintly-pretty room—a view which hardly needed the domed and arcaded mansion on the hilltop behind, or the veiled forms of the Moorish women gliding noiselessly down the pathway opposite, to assure Psyche that this was indeed in very truth that wonderful Africa.

Without and within, to say the truth, to Dumaresq and his daughter, the Oriental character of house and surroundings was everywhere most delightfully and undeniably apparent. The tiny round-topped slits pierced through the thickness of the massive wall; the floor covered with Damascus tiles and overlaid in part with pretty Eastern rugs; the pale-green dado and light-blue frieze of distemper on the sides, separated from one another by a verse of the Koran in breezy Arabic letters running round the room between them as a continuous border; the graceful hangings and delicately-covered drapery—all charmed Psyche, weary and heart-sick though she was, with a delicious vague sense of Orientalism and novelty. As she lay on the crimson and blue divan by the open window, rich perfumed whiffs of the Japanese medlars in full flower floated in upon the cool yet summer-like breeze; and the hillside opposite hummed with insects busy among the blossoms of the great African clematis that fell in cataracts over the rocks and branches. For a moment she almost forgot her sorrow; the oculist was right: what she needed was a life of pure perception.

To Dumaesq, the charm of these novel surroundings was even greater and more striking than to his heart-broken Psyche. He admired throughout the house the infinite diversity and picturesqueness of the arches; here a semicircular doorway with richly-carved decorations in Arabesque patterns; there a pointed Moorish arcade of Saracenic type; and yonder, again, a flat-topped, horseshoe arch of peculiarly-curved and bulging gracefulness, never to be seen anywhere else save here in Algeria. The long rambling passages, cool and gloomy for the hot African summer; the endless doors and nooks and niches; the grated windows and flat roof; the Oriental terrace; the up-and-down steps and uneven levels of the quaint little garden—formed a very ideal scene for an Arabian night's adventure of the fine old pattern. The gray old philosopher, startled into a momentary fit of imagination, almost expected to see Bluebeard's wife emerge unexpectedly from some darkling doorway, or the One-eyed Calender look in upon him unawares through the deep-set window-holes that gave upon the garden.

Yet it was pleasant to find, in spite of the persistent odour of Islam which pervaded the house, that the villa had been modernized and Anglicised after all in a way to suit the most luxurious English taste. It was four o'clock when they arrived at their temporary home, and at five a smiling little Swiss maid brought in a tea-tray with a steaming pot that reminded Psyche of dear old-fashioned Petherton. Tea and the Arabesque are too much all at once. So much modern comfort seems half out of place, side by side with such delicious antique Orientalism.

Psyche would have liked them to spend that evening by themselves in their own rooms; but her father overruled her wishes in that respect. It was best for her, he said, to go out to dinner: to mix at once with the world of Algiers: to conquer these morbid desires for seclusion: to throw herself as far as possible into the new situation. And Psyche, now clay in the potter's hands, yielded unwillingly to his wishes.

At the *table-d'hôte* they were shown to seats near the bottom of the table by a Swiss waiter with his hair cut short, and a general expression of bland good-nature pervading all his stumpy features. The seats opposite them were already occupied by two tall and very stately girls, accompanied by a young man of an open and naïf, but somewhat unfinished, type of countenance. The girls quite frightened Psyche at the very first glance; they looked so queenly and magnificent and awful. Geraldine Maitland herself was hardly half so grand. Their ears were thin and delicately pink; their complexions shone with a transparent lustre; their necks were high and exquisitely moulded; their hands might have come out of a portrait of Sir Peter Lely's. Altogether, Psyche made up her mind at once that the strangers were at the very least duchesses: ladies of the *ancien régime* to a certainty, so calm and clear-cut and dainty were their lineaments. They weren't English; she could see that at a glance: there was something very foreign in the cut of their figures, and of their rich dresses. Psyche was sure she would never be able to say a word to them: so much high-born stateliness fairly took her breath away.

Presently a few more visitors came in, and, seating themselves, began to talk across the table with perfect sang-froid to the magnificent strangers. Psyche envied them their boldness of address. How could they dare to approach such aristocrats?

'Well, did you have your photographs taken, after all, Miss Vanrenen?' a lady opposite asked, with a smile of recognition.

'No, ma'am,' the tallest and stateliest of the beautiful girls answered promptly, with a polite nod. 'We went into the city and had a lovely time, but we couldn't agree upon the currency question. We asked the photographer his lowest cash quotation for doing us in a group under the doorway here in Arab costume, and he gave us an estimate for as much as comes to fourteen dollars. Corona and I don't mind expense, but we're dead against extortion; and we consider fourteen dollars for taking your likeness in an Arab dress downright extortionate. So we concluded to do without the pictures for the present, and to save our specie for a better occasion.'

'I reckon,' the second queenly creature remarked, with a graceful bow, 'we can be taken just as well on Vesuvius when we go along to Naples.'

'That's so,' the first divine efflorescence answered, acquiescent. 'We don't stand out for the Arab dress in itself, you see, ma'am: we only want to be taken somewhere, with something distinctively European or African loafing around in the background—a mosque, or a cathedral, or a burning mountain—so as we can take the picture home and let folks see we're not a fraud—we've really travelled up and down the world a bit.'

'Still,' the brother said, looking round at his sisters with a half-regretful air, 'I must say I wanted Sirena to go the fourteen

dollars blind for all that. You see, Mrs. Prendergast, we might have been taken all in a group under the Moorish archway there; and Miss Maitland would have joined us to complete the picture in that elegant airy Arab get-up of hers.'

'You know Miss Maitland, then?' Psyche ventured to put in timidly, with the natural diffidence of the latest comer.

'Cyrus don't know anybody else, almost,' the taller girl replied, with a smile. 'He was over here alone from Amurrica last fall, and spent the winter by himself in this city; and every letter he wrote us home was a sort of a bulletin about Geraldine Maitland. It was Geraldine Maitland went here; Geraldine Maitland went there; Geraldine Maitland says this; Geraldine Maitland thinks that; till we began to conclude at last for ourselves there weren't any other young ladies at all in Europe except Geraldine Maitland. So Corona and I—that's my sister—we said to ourselves we'd come along this year and inspect for ourselves what sort of a person this girl Geraldine was, before Cyrus brought her home anyway for a permanency.'

'Now, Sirena!' the young man interposed, looking very sheepish, 'I'm a modest man; don't reveal my blushes.'

Psyche was fairly taken aback at this boldness of speech. She had met very few Americans before, and was little accustomed to so much freedom in the public discussion of unfinished matrimonial projects; but her awe at the queenly young women outlived even the discovery of their Western accent, and she only said in a very timid tone:

'We know Miss Maitland, too. She's a very great friend of mine.'

'Then I guess Cyrus and you'll get on together,' Sirena said briskly, 'for whoever likes Geraldine Maitland confers a private obligation, I conjecture, upon Cyrus.'

'We're going to have a very great honour here,' the young man Cyrus interposed sharply, with an evident desire to change the conversation. 'Have you heard, sir, that the great philosopher, Haviland Dumaresq, intends to winter in this city?'

At the words, Psyche coloured up to the roots of her hair; but her father, bowing his stateliest and most distant bow, made answer serenely, without moving a muscle of that stoical face:

'Sir, my name *is* Haviland Dumaresq!'

He had scarcely spoken the word, when Cyrus Vanrenen rose from his seat and walked round the table with immense enthusiasm, but great deliberation.

'Mr. Dumaresq,' he said, seizing the old man's hand in his and wringing it hard, 'allow me the pleasure. Well, now, this is a very great honour, sir. I haven't read your books, Mr. Dumaresq—at least, to any extent, being otherwise engaged myself in business—but I know your name well; and in my country, sir, your works are much admired and highly respected. In the city where I reside—you don't happen to know Cincinnati? No; I thought as much—we set very great store by your valuable writings. The *Cincinnati Observer*, I recollect, on one occasion described you in one of its editorial columns as the "greatest metaphysician of this or any other age." That was high praise, Mr. Dumaresq, from the editorial columns of such an influential print as the *Cincinnati Observer*.'

'I'm glad to learn that I have deserved the commendation of so critical an authority upon philosophical questions,' Haviland Dumaresq answered with grave irony.

But his delicate sarcasm was thrown away upon the honest and innocent young American. That anyone could feel otherwise than pleased and flattered at the polite attentions of the *Cincinnati Observer* was an idea that could never for a moment have entered his good straightforward business head.

'Yes; it's a right smart paper,' he went on with friendly communicativeness. 'Largest circulation of any journal in the State of Ohio: and down the Mississippi Valley we go it blind on culture nowadays, I can tell you. Culture's on the boom in the West at present. No journal that didn't go it blind on culture and philosophy would stand a chance of success in the struggle for life in the Mississippi Valley. Survival of the fittest's our rule out there. We're down upon frauds, but we respect live concerns. If ever you were to light out for Cincinnati, Mr. Dumaresq, you'd find our citizens very appreciative: they'd be honoured to give you a warm welcome.'

'I am much obliged to them for their vivid personal interest in philosophy,' Haviland Dumaresq answered, going on with his soup, and smiling inwardly.

'And is this your daughter, sir?' Cyrus asked once more, as he regained his place and glanced across at Psyche.

Psyche bowed, and faltered 'Yes' with very mixed feelings at being thus trotted out before a whole tableful of utter strangers.

'It must be a very great privilege, Miss Dumaresq,' Sirena remarked, in a clear, unembarrassed American voice, right across the table, 'to pass your life and receive your education in the midst of such cultured European surroundings. Where did you make your recitations? I suppose, now, you've graduated?'

'I've *what?*' Psyche repeated, very much at sea.

'I suppose you've graduated?' Sirena said once more, with perfect self-possession. 'Completed the curriculum at some European academy?'

'Oh no,' Psyche answered, catching at her drift, and blushing crimson by this time, for the eyes of all the table were upon her. 'I—I'm not at all learned. I've been brought up at home. I never went away to school even anywhere.'

'Your poppa's been education enough by himself, I guess?' Corona put in, with a friendly nod over the table towards Dumaresq: from which gesture Psyche concluded that the grand young lady meant to allude obliquely to her father.

'I expect you're a philosopher yourself by this time,' Sirena went on, glancing over at her curiously. 'Corona and I graduated at Vassar, and the philosophy class there read the first volume of the "Encyclopædic Philosophy" for their second year's recitation. It's stiff, Mr. Dumaresq, but our girls like it. Most of our students accept your fundamentals. They adopt your view of the cosmical substratum.'

Dumaresq twirled his gray moustache nervously. Criticism of this type was a decided novelty to him.

'It will be a pleasure to me to think,' he murmured, half aloud, 'as I approach my end, that my labours are approved of by the young ladies of the philosophy class at Vassar College. Few previous philosophers have been cheered by such success. Descartes and Leibnitz went to their graves unrefreshed by the applause of the young ladies of Vassar.'

'But in Amurrica nowadays we manage things better,' Sirena answered, dashing on, all unconscious still of his undercurrent of banter. 'Our women read and think some, Mr. Dumaresq, I assure you. Your philosophy's very much studied in Cincinnati. We run a Dumaresquian Society of our own, lately inaugurated in our city; and when the members learn you're over here in Algiers with us, I expect the ladies and gentlemen of the club'll send along the pages out of their birthday books to get you to write your autograph on them. There's a heap of intelligent appreciation of literatoor in Amurrica: most all of us'd be proud to have your autograph.'

'That's what I admire at so much in Europe,' Cyprus interposed with a pensive air. 'It brings you into contact with literatoor and art in a way you don't get it across our side. Why, lots of our ladies'd give their eyes almost to be brought up in the way Miss Dumaresq's been. In the thick of the literary society of Europe!'

Psyche smiled and answered nothing. Fortunately at that moment another member of the party intervened, and spared poor Psyche's blushes any further.

As they sat for awhile in their own little room before retiring for their first night in Africa, Haviland Dumaresq remarked to his daughter, with a slight shudder:

'Did you ever meet anybody so terrible, Psyche, as that awful American man and his unspeakable sisters? Such a quality as reserve seems utterly unknown to them.'

'But do you know, papa,' Psyche answered, half smiling, 'they're really such kind, good girls, after all. They almost made me sink under the table with shame at dinner, of course; but I've been talking with them all the evening in the salon since, and I find, in spite of their terrible ways, they're so sweet and frank and natural, for all that. One of them—the one they call Sirena—told me I was a "real nice girl"; and when she said it, I could almost have kissed her, she seemed so kind and sympathetic and friendly.'

'Oh, the women are well enough,' her father answered, with masculine tolerance: most men will tolerate a pretty girl, no matter how vulgar. 'But the brother! what a specimen of Cincinnati culture! It almost made me ashamed to think so many of my books had been sold in America when I reflected that that was the kind of man who must mostly buy them. And

then the fulsomeness of the fellow's flattery! Why couldn't he leave poor philosophy alone? What had philosophy ever done to hurt him? I remember Mill's saying to me once: "A thinker should never go into general society unless he knows he can go as a leader and a prophet." That young man would go far to make one say the exact contrary: a thinker should never go at all, unless he knows he can pass in the crowd and remain unnoticed.'

CHAPTER XXX.

PSYCHE IN AFRICA.

For some time after her arrival in Algiers, Psyche seemed to improve a little on the air of Africa. In the first flush of the new Oriental life, her eyes grew stronger for awhile, as Dr. Godichau had confidently predicted. There was always something fresh to look at that roused for the moment her passing attention. And to have her attention roused was exactly what Psyche now most needed. Even a broken-hearted girl can't be placed for the first time in her life in the midst of that wonderful phantasmagoria of Eastern costume and Eastern manners without being momentarily excited and interested. Psyche wished to see, and she saw accordingly.

The three Vanrenens and Geraldine Maitland accompanied her everywhere on her first walks among those enchanted African hillsides. From the *pension* itself, to be sure, the sea was invisible; but a few hundred yards along the cactus-bordered lane that leads to Ali Cherif's villa brought them full in sight of that exquisite bay, and the high snow-capped summits of the glistening Djurjuras. With a little cry of surprise, the first time she went there, Psyche stopped for a moment and gazed entranced at the endless variety of that beautiful panorama. Straight below them, on its three rounded peaks, the town of Algiers, with its dazzling white houses, basked and glowed in the full African sunlight. The whole mass rose up sheer like a series of steps from the water's edge to the mouldering citadel of the Deys that crowns the hilltop. In the antique Arab quarter, each house stood square and flat as a die, whitewashed without, though doubtless dirty enough within; and clustering as they did in tiers one above another with their flat roofs, on the steep slope, nothing could be quaint or more artistic in effect than their general outline. All round, the suburbs spread over the ravine-cut hills, each French château, or Moorish villa, or Arab palace, gleaming apart, surrounded by its own green stretch of olive orchard or pine-grove.

To Psyche, all these Southern sights were new and surprising. She had never set her foot before beyond the four sea-walls of Britain. The tall cypress hedges, the waving date-palms, the scrubby vineyards, the canes and aloes, which to most of us only recall that familiar Riviera, were novelty itself to the untravelled Petherton girl. The glowing white houses with their green tiles, the mosques and minarets, the domes and cupolas, the arcades and the Arabs, the brown-legged boys and veiled women on the road below, all showed her at once she was indeed in Islam. She sighed profoundly. So this was Africa! This was the land where her painter lay buried.

But it was beautiful, too, undeniably beautiful. She felt as she gazed something of that calm subdued pleasure one might naturally feel in some sweet garden cemetery where one's loved one slept among bright clustered flowers. The first poignant anguish of disappointment and loss was over now, and a tender regret had grown up in its place which was almost pleasant. Psyche's heart was fading so gently away that she could look with a certain half-tearful joy at that exquisite view over the sweeping blue bay and the clambering white town that ramped and climbed in successive steps from the purple harbour to the green summit of the Sahel.

Gradually, however, during those first few days in Africa, it began to dawn upon Psyche that the Vanrenens were wealthy—enormously wealthy. And gradually, too, as the same idea came home to Haviland Dumaresq's mind, Psyche noticed with a certain little thrill of horror that her father began to make excuses and apologies for Cyrus Vanrenen's brusque American manner.

'The young man's really a good-hearted young fellow,' he said more than once to Psyche, 'though of course uncultured. But I dare say he might be brought into shape after a time. Young men are plastic—remarkably plastic.'

One of those days, as Psyche and Geraldine returned from a country walk, they found Haviland Dumaresq, in his gray morning suit and his rough woollen cap, engaged in examining the Arab wares which a couple of tawny pedlars in turban and burnous had unrolled from their pack and spread on the ground under the open piazza.

The scene was indeed a curiously picturesque one. On one side stood the great European philosopher, tall and erect, with his pointed gray beard and his luminous eyes, the furthest artistic development, as it were, of the Western idea in costume and humanity. On the other hand lay stretched the two lithe and graceful Orientals, in their flowing robes and not unbecoming dirt, with their oval faces and big melancholy eyes, reclined at their ease on their own Persian rugs, flung down for sale on the tiled floor of the piazza. All round stood piled in picturesque confusion the quaint bric-à-brac which forms the universal stock-in-trade of all these lazy and romantic old-world packmen. Coarse hand-made pots of

red and yellow earthenware; tortoiseshell guitars and goat-skin tambourines; inlaid brass trays, with Arabic inscriptions in silver lettering; native jewellery, set thick with big beads of bright-red coral and lumps of lapis lazuli; swords and daggers of antique make; embroideries rich with silver and gold; pierced brazen lamps stolen from desecrated Tunisian mosques; haiks and burnouses of Tlemçen workmanship. All lay tumbled on the ground in one great glittering mass, and Haviland Dumaresq, with attentive eyes, stood propped against the parapet of the arcaded balustrade and glanced at them hard in philosophic reverie.

'Hello! pedlars again!' Cyrus Vanrenen exclaimed with boyish glee as he opened the door and came face to face with them. 'They've set up store in the front piazza! Been making any purchase to-day, Mr. Dumaresq? The one-eyed calendar there' (for the younger of the Arabs had lost an eye), 'he knows how to charge; he's a rare old rascal. How much do you want for the ostrich egg, mister? Combien l'[oe]juf, mon ami—comprenez-vous—combien?'

He took the thing up in his hands as he spoke. It was a half-egg richly set as a cup in Kabyle metal-work, and suspended from three graceful silver chains to hang from the ceiling.

'Fifty francs,' the Arab answered in French, showing all his teeth in the regular melancholy Arab smile.

'Here you are, then,' Cyrus said, taking out his purse. 'Tenez; vous voici. May I offer it to you for a little souvenir, Miss Dumaresq? It'd look real pretty hung down from the gas in the centre of a parlour.'

'Oh, Mr. Vanrenen!' Geraldine cried, aghast; 'you oughtn't to pay what they ask, offhand, you know. You'll spoil the market. You should offer them half. You ought to *marchander* for everything with the Arabs. If you'd *marchandé'd* for that, you'd have got it easily for at least thirty.'

'I guess so,' Cyrus answered with a careless air, handing the egg over to Psyche, who took it half irresolutely. 'But time's money, you see, across our way—a fact which these gentlemen in the bare legs don't seem to catch on at; and twenty francs ain't worth standing and bargaining about in the sun for half an hour.'

'Oh, thank you ever so much!' Psyche said, admiring it. 'Do you really mean I'm to take it, Mr. Vanrenen? How very kind of you! Isn't it lovely, papa? It'd look just sweet hung up in the recess over the sideboard at Petherton.'

'It *is* pretty,' her father said, taking it from her with evident embarrassment. 'Extremely pretty in its own curious barbaric way, though, of course, it exhibits the usual extravagant barbaric tendency towards reckless profusion of ornament over the entire field. In the best decorative art, the ornament, instead of being lavished on all parts alike, is concentrated on important constructive features.'

'Oh, you look here, Cyrus!' Corona cried, gazing up at the wall, where the Arabs had hung an exquisite embroidered satin *portière*. 'Ain't that just lovely? Ain't the colours sweet? Did you ever see anything prettier in your life than that, now?'

'And wouldn't it look elegant.' Sirena continued in the same breath, 'hung up in the archway between the drawing-room and the ante-room at Cincinnati?'

Cyrus put his head on one side and eyed it critically. It was indeed a charming piece of old Oriental needlework, torn from the spoils of some far inland mosque. The ground was of dainty old-gold satin; and the embroidery, rich in many tints of silk, was thoroughly Saracenic in type and colouring.

'Combien?' Cyrus asked laconically, after a brief pause. His stock of French was remarkable for its scantiness; but he beat it out thin for active service, and made each word do the utmost duty of which it was capable.

'Douze cent francs,' the Arab merchant answered, holding up the fingers of both hands, and then two over, as an aid to comprehension.

'Je vous donne six cent,' Cyrus observed tentatively, well warned by Geraldine's superior wisdom.

'C'est à vous, monsieur. Prenez-le,' the Arab answered, as he bowed and shrugged his shoulders with perfect coolness.

And Cyrus, pulling out the twenty-four pounds in good French gold, handed it over at once, and seized the *portière*.

'That's for you, Sirena,' he said, laying the thing lightly across his eldest sister's arm. 'You can hang it in the archway when we go back to Amurrica.'

'You're real good, Cyrus,' Sirena answered, kissing him fraternally before the scandalized faces of those disconcerted Arabs. (The conduct of these Frank women is really too abandoned!)

'That's just like Cyrus!' Corona said laughingly. 'He don't know how to get rid of his dollars fast enough. If he went into the market and took a fancy to a camel, I guess he'd purchase it to take it across to Amurrica. Yes, sir; he's a first-rate hand at spending money, Cyrus is. But, then, you see, he's a first-rate hand, come to think, at making it.'

'It's easier to make a dollar in Amurrica than a shilling in England,' Cyrus answered apologetically; 'and it's easier to spend it than to spend sixpence. That's what I always say when I come across this side. A man's got to work pretty hard at his spending hereabouts, or he finds the money accumulate inconveniently in his waistcoat-pocket.'

'I've never been inconvenienced in that way myself,' Dumaresq murmured with grim irony.

'No, sir, I reckon you haven't,' Cyrus answered with refreshing American frankness. 'But, then, you've never put your brains into the business, or you'd have struck it rich. You've been otherwise occupied. You've made what's better than money—fame, reputation, an honoured name in the world's history. Why, I'd rather have written the "Encyclopædic Philosophy" any day, Mr. Dumaresq, than boss the biggest and most successful pork concern in all Cincinnati!'

Haviland Dumaresq shrank into his shoes. Great heavens, what an ideal of earthly success! And yet—the man was evidently rich. Besides, Americans have the plasticity of youth. Young communities resemble in some respects young individuals. As is the mass, so are the units. There's no knowing what you may not make out of an American, if you catch him young, take him in hand firmly, and expose him consistently for two or three years to the mellowing influence of a fresh environment. Americans have plenty of undeveloped tact: it needs but intercourse with more refined societies to bring that latent faculty visibly to the surface.

CHAPTER XXXI.

A NILE TOURIST.

Somewhere about the same time when these things were passing at Algiers, the Reverend Francis Austen Linnell, Vicar of Hambledon-cum-Thornyhaugh, Northumberland, sat with his legs dangling over a huge block of sculptured sandstone, among the massive ruins of the vast and many-chambered temple of Rameses the Great by the quay at Luxor.

The Reverend Francis Austen Linnell, to say the truth, was in a gloomy humour. He revenged himself upon the world, indeed, by hammering with his stick at the crumbling figures of Khem and Isis that covered the huge sandstone block on whose top he was seated. Time and invaders had gently spared those sculptured forms for six thousand years; the Persian, the Greek, the Roman, and the Arab, had all swept over the land, and let them go by unhurt: but the Reverend Francis Austen Linnell, with his iron-shod stick, took a malicious pleasure now, like a veritable British tourist that he was, in defacing the nose of the gray goddess whom so many ages and so many conquerors had looked down upon without injury. Things had gone badly with the last of the Linnells on the Upper Nile. He had pushed as far up towards Wady Halfa as the courtesy of the military authorities would permit during those stormy times: he had questioned every real or supposed refugee from Khartoum whom he could find anywhere among the native bazaars; but he had elicited nothing of the slightest importance about his half-brother or his cousin. Their fate remained as absolutely doubtful as the fate of all the other defenders of the conquered city. Vague rumours and surmises there were plenty, to be sure, but of solid fact or certain assurance, not a single item.

So the Reverend Francis Austen Linnell had returned to Luxor in a very ill humour, and had left his dahabeeah now moored close under the bank by the Karnak Hotel, while he himself sat, disconsolate and alone, chipping bits from the bas-reliefs, among the ruins of the temple.

To be sure, there was some hope of news still; for a strange report went about at Luxor that day. A European refugee, it was rumoured—a newspaper correspondent or somebody of the sort, who had remained in Khartoum up to the very last moment—had yesterday arrived across the desert at Assouan. Now, if this European refugee turned out a reality, there might still be some chance of learning Sir Austen's fate from a presentable witness. So the Reverend Frank sat and gazed around with a somewhat contemptuous glance at the mass of dust and dirt and rubbish that encumbers the base of that gigantic ruin, and waited impatiently for the expected traveller.

Of course Frank Linnell was not alone. Nobody is ever alone for ten seconds in Egypt. The custom of the country does not permit solitude. A crowd of pestering little native boys, picturesquely arrayed in torn and ragged commissariat corn-sacks, with flies clustering thickly on their bleared eyes, held out their tawny hands, and showed their hideous artificial sores, and clamoured for backshish with true Egyptian persistence. The Reverend Frank regarded them cynically.

'No backshish,' he answered in an angry tone, threatening them with his stick, and laying about him roundly over their naked shoulders. 'Not one penny of backshish will any of you get from me to-day. Go along, I say. Don't want you here. Leave me alone, can't you?'

The boys fell back for a moment, still crying 'Backshish, backshish!' and regarded the stranger with a suspicious glance. Frank Linnell rose, and strolled idly towards another part of the building. The boys followed him through the deep dust, hustling him as he went with genuine Oriental eagerness.

'Rameses! You want see Rameses? Me very good guide! Me show you Rameses!' they cried in chorus in their broken English, dancing before Frank Linnell's footsteps, raising clouds of dust as they went, and leading the way triumphantly towards the great colossal seated statue.

'Me want no backshish,' one of them insinuated coaxingly with a persuasive air. 'Want to show English gentleman de way. Me very good boy. Dis way for see Rameses, and no backshish.'

Frank Linnell was a hasty-tempered man, and he was also gifted with the common British incapacity for grasping the idea that anybody else should be unable to comprehend his own language, if quite distinctly, articulately, and loudly spoken. So he paused on his march for a second, and leaned his back impressively against the base of one of Amenhotep's great sculptured pylons in the central temple.

'Now, you look here, you boys,' he observed with dignity, in his most didactic tone, holding up one warning forefinger, as if he were addressing his own national school at Hambleton-cum-Thornyaugh in the county of Northumberland: 'I've seen Rameses the Great fifty times already, in every possible form, shape, and material—sitting and standing, fighting and feasting, on foot or in his chariot, life-size or colossal—till I'm sick and tired of him. I don't want to see Rameses the Great again, in any place, position, dress, or fashion, as long as I live; and I hope to goodness I may never more set eyes upon him anywhere. I don't like Rameses—do you understand?—I object to Rameses: I disapprove of Rameses: and I don't care for antiquities. I came out here in this precious temple this morning to try and get a little peace and quiet, not to be bothered with boys and colossal statues. And if any one of you fellows comes one step nearer me'—he drew a line in the dust with his stick as his spoke—'if any one of you fellows dares to step one inch across that line, all I can say is,' lifting his stick suggestively in the precise attitude of the Pharaohnic hero—'I'll give him Rameses across his back and shoulders before he's another ten minutes older.'

The boys listened gravely to every word of this succinct address, and then, seizing with avidity upon the one word of the whole which they really understood, vociferated once more in chorus:

'Yes, sah: Rameses, sah: me very good guide: me show you Rameses: dis way, sah, for Rameses de Great: dis way to Rameses.'

The parson from Northumberland poised himself firmly against the half-buried propylon, and resigned himself to a comical look of despair at the little brown ragamuffins, who still held out their eight or ten hands persistently for backshish. As he stood there, the very picture of the baffled Briton in the midst of his foes, whose light infantry proved far too nimble for his heavy guns to disperse, an Arab, as he thought, approached by the door from the opposite direction, and walked straight up to him, with outstretched hand, as if bent on entering into conversation with the usual practical object of obtaining backshish.

The newcomer was dressed in semi-European clothes, with an old red fez stuck jauntily on his head, as is the fashion with temple guardians and other such minor hangers-on of the bankrupt Egyptian Government. Frank Linnell immediately suspected another attempt to rob him of a fee, under pretence of asking for the official permit to visit the antiquities of Upper Egypt; so he waved the stranger aside impatiently with his warning hand, and observed once more, very loudly, in his native tongue—the only one he could use with fluency:

'No backshish! no backshish! I've been here before. I've fee'd every precious soul—man, woman, or child—connected in any way with the management of this temple; and not a piastre more will one of you get out of me. Not a piastre more. Understand. Not a solitary piastre.'

To his great surprise, the stranger, instead of bowing low and retreating politely, smiled a benign smile, and answered in English, of an unexpectedly flowing, yet distinctly Hibernian character:

'Ye're mistaken, Mr. Linnell. It's Mr. Linnell I have the pleasure of addressing, isn't it? Ah, yes; I thought so. They told me at the hotel a clergyman of yer name had been asking when I'd be likely coming down the river; so I thought I'd just step out at once, and see if I could find ye.'

Frank Linnell gave a sudden start of astonishment. Could this be the refugee?

'You're not the correspondent they spoke of, who's escaped from Khartoum, surely?' he cried in some excitement.

The stranger nodded a courteous assent.

'Me name's Considine,' he answered, with conscious pride—'one of the fighting Considines of County Cavan. I was correspondent at Khartoum for the *Daily Telephone*. Ah, ye may well stare, sirr, for it's a narrow squeak indeed I've had of it. When the city was taken, those nigger fellows of the Mahdi's, they just chopped me up piecemeal into small fragments; and as I lay there on the ground in sections, near the Bourré Gate, thinking of me poor old mother in Ireland, "Considine, me boy," says I to meself, or as much as was left of me, "diamond cement'll never be able to stick ye completely together again." But, somehow, they dovetailed the bits after all, and took me into the hospital; and I pulled through, by the kind offices of some Soudanese ladies, who were good enough to adopt me; and here I am, sirr, a miserable wreck as far as legs and arms go—why, those heathen hacked me to pieces, so that ye couldn't lay a sixpence between the scars on me body, I give ye me word for it—but ready to go to the world's end to help a fellow-countryman in distress, or a lady who stands in need of assistance. Well, sirr, I'm glad to meet ye, and to make yer acquaintance, for I

knew yer brother, and I can give ye later news of him than ye'll get in the newspapers.'

The Reverend Frank drew himself up on his dignity a little stiffly.

'Sir Austen Linnell was my cousin, not my brother,' he answered, with official vagueness, for he could never quite bring himself to acknowledge the existence of the actress-woman's son, who had deprived him of his birthright.

'Tut, tut, tut, man,' the correspondent answered, not without a faint tinge of wholesome contempt in his tone. 'I knew them both—yer cousin and yer brother—and a finer man or a braver than Charles Linnell, whom ye want to disown, I never set eyes on. Sure, ye needn't be ashamed of him.'

And seating himself on the broken pillar by the clergyman's side, Considine began to narrate in full, with much Irish spirit and many graphic details, the whole story of the siege, and his own almost miraculous escape from Khartoum.

'But what ye'll be wanting to know most,' he said at last, after he'd dilated at some length upon the fragmentary condition in which the Mahdi's troops had left his various limbs on the ground at Khartoum, and the gradual way in which 'the chips had been picked up and welded together again,' as with some pardonable exaggeration he phrased it—'what ye'll be wanting to know, is how yer brother came out of all this trouble.'

'Did he come out of it at all?' the Reverend Frank inquired, with a little undercurrent of tremulousness in his anxious tone—'or Sir Austen either? Have you any accurate information about their fate to give me?'

'Accurate information, is it? Well, it isn't just the moment for observing accurately, ye must own yerself, when ye're lying about loose in pieces, waiting for somebody to pick ye up and put ye together again,' Considine retorted gaily. 'But all I can tell ye is this: on the morning when the niggers broke like ants into Khartoum, yer cousin and yer brother were both alive; and if *I* got away, why shouldn't they too? They were as clever as I was.'

'It's very improbable,' Mr. Frank Linnell replied incredulously, yet much disconcerted. 'They were both reported "most likely dead" in the newspaper despatches.'

'Were they so, now?' Considine echoed with profound interest.

'Yes. Stragglers and refugees even said their bodies had been identified near the Bourré Gate.'

Considine looked up with a smile of relief.

'They did, did they? Then ye may take it for granted,' he answered, in a tone of profound conviction, 'that they're both this minute alive and kicking.'

'Why so?' the parson asked with a thrill of unpleasant surprise. Family affection didn't prompt him to desire the escape of either of his two respected relations.

'Why, have ye never observed,' Considine answered with great good-humour, and the demonstrative air of a mathematician proving a theorem, 'that whatever's put in the newspapers about anybody ye know yerself is as sure as fate to be utterly mistaken? I'm a newspaper man meself, and I ought to be an unprejudiced observer of journalism. Take yer own case, now. Weren't ye kilt in a railway accident? Didn't the newspapers report ye entirely dead? Well, and when I went to the hotel just now, they told me ye were here. "Impossible," says I; "the man's kilt long ago." "But he came to life again," says the hotel-keeper; "it was only a railway accident." "To be sure," says I; "how stupid of me not to have thought of that before! I might have known he was alive—for didn't I see his death meself in the newspaper?'"

'Such cases must be very rare,' Mr. Frank Linnell responded with British caution.

'Rare, is it, sirr?' the correspondent echoed hastily. 'Well, then, take me own case again. Wasn't I kilt in Afghanistan, as the *Times* itself announced? and didn't I turn up for all that six months later at Quetta? Wasn't I kilt with Stanley on the Upper Congo; and didn't we all come out again, after all, alive and well, at Zanzibar? Wasn't I kilt in Khartoum the other day, and cut up into sausage-meat for the use of the commissariat; and ain't I on me way down to Cairo now, to offer me services and the remains of me body to me own Government for future expeditions? No, no, sirr; depend upon it, if ever a man's kilt in the newspapers, as sure as fate, it's a very good symptom. Why do I give Gordon up, though there are some that think he's living still? Why, just because the newspapers were afraid to kill him. And why do I believe yer brother's alive, and your cousin too? Why, just because the newspapers, ye tell me, without one qualm of doubt, have got

rid of them altogether.'

'But you say you were in Khartoum for three months after its fall,' Frank Linnell objected. 'Did you ever hear or see anything of either of my real or supposed relations?'

'And d'ye think we went paying calls and leaving pasteboards in Khartoum after the Mahdi's people came?' Considine retorted contemptuously. 'Why, sirr, till the night I stole away with a small body of natives going north on duty, I never dared to show me nose outside me own quarters, where the Soudanese ladies I told ye of were kindly taking care of me—for I flatter meself I always got on with the ladies. But one thing I can tell ye, and that's certain.' He dropped his voice to a confidential whisper. 'At Dongola I met a water-carrier who'd been in Khartoum to the end, and he recognised me at once when he saw me in the bazaar. And he told me he'd observed a white man, disguised as an Indian Mussulman, in Khartoum town a month after the capture, whose description exactly answered to yer brother's. At the time I thought he must be mistaken; for I saw Linnell cut down, meself, in the great square; but now ye tell me the newspapers have kilt him, I'd stake me reputation it was Charlie Linnell the fellow saw, and that ye'll welcome him home yet some day at yer parsonage in England.'

CHAPTER XXXII.

SHOPPING.

A few days after her arrival in Algiers, Psyche had so far recovered from her fatigue that Geraldine Maitland arranged a party to go down into the town together.

The winter visitors at Algiers live entirely on the Mustapha hill, at a distance of some two or three miles from the town and harbour. A breakneck Arab path, sunk deep in the soil like a Devonshire lane, leads the foot-passenger in a straight line by tumble-down steps to the outskirts and the shore: omnibuses and carriages follow the slower zigzags of a broad modern highway that winds by gentle gradients round numerous elbows to the town wall at the Porte d'Isly. Psyche and the Vanrenens, under Geraldine's guidance, took the comfortable tram (the horse-car, Cyrus called it) by this latter route, and descended gradually to the ramparts of the French engineers.

Once within the gate, in Algiers proper, Psyche felt herself immediately in the very thick and heart of Islam. Who shall describe that wonderful dramatic Oriental world—ever old, yet ever new—busy with human life as bees at a swarming, or ants when a stick has been poked into their nest; all seething and fermenting in a Babel of tongues, and hurrying and scurrying on every side for no possible or conceivable earthly reason? Algiers is the most fascinating and animated of Mediterranean towns. Dirty, malodorous, African if you will, but alive all over, and intensely attractive and alluring for all that, in its crowded streets and courts and alleys. Psyche was not lucky enough to meet on her entry a laden caravan of solemn, long-legged camels, striding placidly out on their start for the desert; but the donkeys, the mules, the Moors, the Arabs, the infinite variety of colour and costume, amply sufficed to keep her attention alive as they threaded their way through that quaint jumble of all Mediterranean and African nationalities.

Geraldine, to whom all this was as familiar as Petherton, led them lightly through the vestibule of the town. Psyche was amused, in spite of her sadness, at the curious jumble of transparent incongruities in that antique new-fangled Franco-Moorish Algiers. Here, a little French *épicerie*, ensconced half hidden in an ill-lighted shop, where Provençal bourgeois folk served out small odds and ends to bareheaded negresses; there, an Arab café, darker and dirtier still, where dusky, cross-legged figures in Oriental costume, innocent of the laundry, smoked doubtful tobacco and tossed off cups of black steaming Mocha; and yonder, again, a little bazaar for Moorish curiosities, where a Barbary Jew in dark-coloured turban, jacket, and sash, ogled them in with oleaginous smile to inspect his cheap stock of Birmingham antiquities. At every step Psyche stopped irresistibly to gaze and smile; the town itself and all its stream of passengers unrolled itself in long and endless perspective like a living panorama before her attentive eyes.

They passed a big square with a well-kept garden of the formal French sort; a theatre that for size and imposing front might almost compare with the finest in Paris; a close-piled insanitary Arab quarter, by no means running with milk and rose-water; a tangle of lanes threading their way steeply up hill in every possible direction except a straight line, for which native architects appear to harbour an instinctive dislike; a narrow courtyard open to the sky; a whitewashed mosque, where a respectable gray-bearded native *cadi* squatted cross-legged on the floor doing equal justice by summary process between his Arab neighbours. Railways, tram-cars, donkeys, and omnibuses; a European brass band, and a group of red-cloaked Arabs from the desert; Moorish squalor, dirt, and discomfort; the kiosks and journals and loungers of the boulevards! The main street through which they made their tortuous way was arcaded like Paris; but, oh, what a difference in the surging crowd that thronged and filled it in unending variety! Arab, Moor, Kabyle, and Negro; Jewesses with their heads enclosed in tight black skull-caps, and their chins tied up as if they suffered perennially from an aggravated complication of mumps and toothache; and Mussulman women who showed above their veils but their great black eyes, yet coquetted so freely with those and their twitching fingers in the corners of their robes that Cyrus almost ceased to wonder as he passed at their prudent lords' precautionary measures.

They turned round by the brand-new minarets of the modernized cathedral, and entered the narrow little Rue de la Lyre. Ahmed ben Abd-er-Rahman (may Allah increase him!) has a Moorish shop in that dark thoroughfare which is the joy and delight of all feminine sojourners in the tents of Shem. Corona's face lighted up with pleasure.

'Why, we're going to Abd-er-Rahman's!' she exclaimed with much delight. 'That's nice, Miss Dumaresq. I do just love a good day's shopping down here in the Moorish part of the city.'

'Don't call me "Miss Dumaresq,"' Psyche said gently. 'Call me Psyche, won't you!'

Corona drew back in genuine hesitation.

'May I?' she asked. 'Well, I do call that real nice of you, now! I was afraid to be too much at home with Haviland Dumaresq's daughter, you see. But you ain't set up. It's right kind and friendly of you—that's just what it is! And will you call us Sirena and Corona?'

Psyche in her turn drew back, hesitating.

'Why, I thought you so grand when I first saw you,' she said, taken aback. 'I was afraid to talk to you, almost, I was so dreadfully frightened.'

'Well, I do call that good, now!' Corona cried, laughing. 'Say, Sirena, here's Psyche says when she first saw us she was most afraid to speak at table to us!'

'Well, I want to know!' Sirena exclaimed, much amused. 'Afraid of you and me, Corona!'

They both laughed at it as a very good joke; and Psyche, she knew not why, laughed too, for their merriment was contagious. They had reached by this time a darkling corridor in the dingy side-street, under whose gloomy arch Geraldine plunged undismayed, and led them all blindfold into a central court, where Psyche found herself at once, to her sudden surprise, in a perfect paradise of Oriental art, set out in an unaffected living museum of Oriental architecture. The courtyard was tiled and roofed in with glass: round the lower floor ran a pretty open arcade of Saracenic arches; the upper story was also arcaded, but hemmed in by a balustrade of pierced woodwork, carved and latticed like a medieval screen in exquisite patterns. All round lay the usual farrago of Eastern curiosities: Damascus lamps, and Persian saddle-cloths, and Morocco jars, and Algerian embroideries, all scattered about loosely in picturesque confusion. In the centre sat solid old Abd-er-Rahman himself in dignified silence—a massive old Moor in an embroidered coat and ample turban; he rose as Geraldine Maitland entered, and bowed her into his shop with stately courtesy.

'You're tired, dear,' Geraldine said to her friend, as she turned to mount the stairs to the second floor. 'The girls and I'll go up and look at the things in the gallery there. Mr. Vanrenen, you'll stop down here with Psyche, and find her a chair, for she mustn't fatigue herself.'

'Why, certainly,' Cyrus answered, nothing loath. He had a vested interest in Psyche now. He had seen a good deal of the pink-and-white English girl during these last few days—more white than pink, of late, unhappily; and what with Sirena's hints and Geraldine Maitland's obduracy, he had almost begun to consider with himself the leading question whether one high-toned Englishwoman might not do at a pinch almost as well in the end as another. So he sat and talked with her with a very good grace, while Corona and Sirena cheapened trays and Koran stands with Abd-er-Rahman himself in the upper gallery.

They waited long, and Cyrus at last began to covet in turn some of the pretty embroideries that lay heaped in piles on one another around them. He turned a few over carelessly with his hands.

'There's a beauty, now,' he said, taking up a long strip of antique Tunisian needlework and holding it out at arm's-length before Psyche. 'I expect Corona wouldn't mind that bit, Miss Dumaresq.'

'It *is* lovely,' Psyche said—'as lovely as a picture. How much—an artist—would admire a piece like that now, Mr. Vanrenen!'

She said 'an artist'; but she meant in her heart Linnell. Her mind went back at a bound to those old days at Petherton. Cyrus threw it lightly and gracefully round her shoulder. Your American, even though unskilled in the courtesy of words, has always a certain practical gracefulness in his treatment of women. He regards them as something too fragile and costly to be roughly handled.

'It becomes you, Miss Dumaresq,' he said, gazing at her admiringly. 'You look quite a picture in it. It'd make up beautifully for evening dress, I expect.'

Psyche trembled lest he should buy that too.

'Papa wouldn't like me to wear it, though,' she put in hastily. 'I'm sure he wouldn't let me. It's against his principles.'

Cyrus leaned back on his chair and surveyed her with a certain distant chivalrous regard.

'That's a pity,' he answered, 'for I'd like to give it to you.'

Psyche made haste to decline the kindly-meant suggestion.

'Oh, how good of you!' she cried. 'But you mustn't, please. I'd rather you wouldn't. Why, you seem to buy everything that takes your fancy. How awfully rich you must be, Mr. Vanrenen!'

'Well, I ain't in want,' Cyrus admitted frankly. 'I can afford most anything I feel I'm in need of.'

'I've never known any rich people before,' Psyche said abstractedly, for want of something better to say. 'Papa thinks poor people are more the right sort for us to know.'

'No?' Cyrus murmured with genuine regret. He liked Psyche, and he wanted her to like him.

Psyche played with the corner of the embroidery, embarrassed. She felt she had said one of the things she had rather have left unsaid.

'But he likes *you*,' she went on with her charming smile. 'In fact, we both like you.'

'No?' Cyrus said again, in a very pleased voice. 'Now, I call that real nice and friendly of him, Miss Dumaresq.'

Psyche folded up the embroidery and replaced it on the heap. This interview was beginning to get embarrassingly long. Just as she was wondering what on earth she could say next, Geraldine Maitland came down the steps with Corona and Sirena to relieve her from her painfully false position.

'Where next?' Cyrus exclaimed, jumping up from his seat. 'Sirena always goes the rounds of the stores regularly when she comes into the city.'

'To the photographer's,' Sirena said; 'I want some of those lovely views of the ragged boys. These little Arab chaps are just sweet, Miss Maitland.'

So they went to Famin's in the Rue Bab-Azoun, where Sirena had seen the particular photographs she so specially coveted.

Psyche's eyes gave her no trouble. She entered the shop and gazed around it fearlessly. On an easel in the corner was a painting of an Arab girl standing under a doorway in the native town. Psyche's heart came up into her mouth as her gaze fell upon it. She was no judge of art, but love had taught her better than years in museums or galleries could ever have done to know one artist's hand. She recognised in a moment that unmistakable touch. It was a specimen of Linnell's Algerian subjects!

The colour fled from her cheek all at once. She gazed at it hard, and took it all in slowly. Then, all of a sudden, as she still looked, for the first time since she arrived in Algeria, the shop and the picture faded away before her. She groped her way over to a chair in her distress. Thick darkness enveloped the world. Cyrus, astonished, led her over to a chair.

'Thank you,' she said, as she seated herself upon it. 'Geraldine—my eyes——'

She could get no further.

Geraldine understood it all with feminine quickness. She beckoned Cyrus out of the shop quietly.

'Run for a fiacre,' she said, herself all trembling. 'You'll find one opposite the mosque in the square. Her eyes have gone again. I know what's the matter. That's one of the pictures Mr. Linnell painted. Psyche was very much attached to him indeed, and he died at Khartoum. I tell you this to secure your help. Don't say anything more about it than you can avoid at the Orangers. And tell Corona and Sirena to keep it quite quiet.'

Cyrus nodded assent.

'You may depend upon me,' he said; and he was off at full speed to get the fiacre. When it arrived, he led out Psyche with tender care, and placed her like a brother in the corner of the cushions. They drove up in silence, for the most part, Geraldine alone having the courage to make occasional pretences at conversation. By the time they reached the gate of the Orangers, the veil had fallen again from Psyche's eyes. But her father, who met her at the door with his searching

glance, was not to be deceived.

'Your sight went again,' he said with awe as he scanned her pallid face. And Psyche, too truthful to try to hide it, answered merely, 'Yes, papa,' and hid her sorrow straightway in her own little bedroom.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

A NEW SUITOR.

Time marched on, as indeed it often does in this prosaic world of ours; and Psyche's life at the Pension des Orangers grew daily more and more like her life at Petherton. The first flush of freshness in the African world wore gradually away; and even as it disappeared Psyche's eyesight returned once more to something of the same deplorable condition as at the Wren's Nest. Only, a general dimness began at last to supervene. Instead of periods of occasional loss of sight, interspersed with periods of perfect vision, Psyche was conscious of a constant decrease in visual power, so that she only saw with clearness and distinctness now when she made a definite effort of attention towards any particular object. The fact was, the change was but evanescent. The cause of her malady still remained untouched. Her sight was failing.

She passed much of her time all those days with Geraldine Maitland: much also with Cyrus, Sirena, and Corona. Geraldine, indeed, did all she could to throw the four together. The girls, she thought, were nice lively companions for poor broken-hearted Psyche: they roused and stimulated her: and Geraldine even cherished some faint hope that Cyrus's good-nature and kindness of heart might at last engage Psyche's passing interest. For Geraldine had a genuine affection—of a sort—for Cyrus: knowing his profound admiration for 'high-toned' Englishwomen, she would have been delighted—if only she could have handed him over to Psyche.

With this end in view, she had concocted from the beginning a little scheme of her own to create in the genial young American's mind an interest in the pretty and shrinking English girl. Before the Dumaresqs' arrival she had arranged with Cyrus that he should pay nearly one-half their bill at the *pension*, in the utmost secrecy; and so had created a proprietary feeling by anticipation towards both father and daughter in the generous Westerner's chivalrous soul. For Cyrus, though engaged, like all the rest of Cincinnati, in the fluctuating concerns of the wholesale pork market, had a nature as tender as any English gentleman's; and his feeling of protection towards Psyche might easily ripen under these peculiar circumstances into one of a far more intimate and personal kind.

As for Geraldine, her own attitude towards her American admirer was very peculiar. She liked Cyrus immensely; but, as Cyrus himself rightly divined, the money alone stood in the way. She could never endure the world should think she had sold herself for Cincinnati gold. A little wholesome opposition, indeed, on Mrs. Maitland's part might have worked wonders for Cyrus's chance of success; but Mrs. Maitland, sharp woman of the world as she was by nature and training, was yet not quite sharp enough to perceive that opportunity for carrying her point. Her tactics had less of finesse about them than of sheer persistence. She saw her end clearly, and made for it, with most unwomanly directness, by what seemed to her the plain straight path. And Geraldine, who could be led but could not be driven, found her mother's advocacy of Cyrus's claims a considerable factor against the honest and manly young American's chances.

A month or two had passed, and Sirena sat one day in the garden on the hillside slope under the pleasant shade of a drooping pepper-tree. The full African sun was pouring down his splendour on terraces rich with rose and geranium. Tall irises flaunted their beauty in the air, and bees hummed busily around the heavy-scented loquat trees. Psyche and Corona were seated on the bench in the tennis court below, watching a set between some others of the visitors; for the irrepressible Briton, wherever he goes, *must* have his tennis lawn. Sirena laid down her novel with a yawn. A shadow from behind fell across the path. She looked up suddenly. It was Haviland Dumaresq.

The old man seated himself by her side with a fatherly air. He had learned to like Sirena by this time; she was always so kind to his precious Psyche. When Psyche's eyes were most seriously affected, it was Sirena who came to her bedroom to read to her; when Psyche couldn't see to guide a pen, it was Sirena who helped her to write her letters. Haviland Dumaresq could pardon for that even Sirena's name; no siren she, indeed, but a simple-hearted, kindly-natured, rough, self-satisfied, self-sufficing Western girl. Besides, was she not Cyrus Vanrenen's sister; and were not Haviland Dumaresq's ideas for the moment beginning vaguely to fix themselves upon Cyrus Vanrenen's future? Anything on earth, now, to turn the current of Psyche's mind into fresh directions!

'My darling grows no better, Miss Sirena,' he said pathetically, as he glanced at Psyche sitting with that settled resigned air of hers on the bench far below. 'I had hoped much from this trip to Africa. Every day I stop here my hopes grow slenderer. As the novelty palls, the evil increases. She's fading like a flower. I know not what next to try to rouse her.'

Sirena glanced back at him with tears in her eyes.

'Do you think she'll go blind, then, sir?' she asked anxiously.

'Unless we can change the set of her thoughts,' Dumaresq answered in a very slow voice, 'purely functional as the evil is, I begin to fear it. An effort would suffice to make her see as well as ever, to be sure; but she seems incapable even of making that effort. Her will-power's gone. She lacks initiative. She has nothing left to live for, I'm afraid, just now. I wish to God we could find something to interest her in life. At her age, such a want of living-power's simply unnatural.'

'That's so, sir,' Sirena answered, half afraid, for she could never quite conquer her instinctive terror of the famous thinker.

'You know the cause?' Haviland Dumaresq suggested tentatively.

'I guess so, in part,' Sirena answered with what might (for an American girl) be almost called timidity. 'Miss Maitland's enabled me to draw my own conclusions.'

Haviland Dumaresq paused for a moment, irresolute. Then he went on dreamily, in his half-soliloquizing fashion:

'It would be a great thing, though, if we could make her take some living interest in something or somebody else, instead of leaving her to this perpetual brooding over her buried grief.'

'It would so,' Sirena assented eagerly.

Dumaresq started at the cordiality of this assent. Her tone, he felt sure, said more than her words. She had thought it over—thought it over before. Here, surely, was an ally—a ready-made ally. If only the current of Psyche's thought could be turned! It wasn't only for her happiness nowadays, alas! it was for her eyes, her sight, her health, her very life almost.

'Nothing will ever give her a chance now, I fear,' he said slowly, still fixing his gaze on Psyche in the distance, 'except the slow growth of a fresh affection. It would have to be slow—it would have to be long—it would have to be all begun from without, for Psyche herself, in her present frame of mind, would never begin it. She's lost the impetus. Her heart's too much bound up now in that unknown grave. But if anybody should ever happen to fall in love with her, and to press his suit upon her by gentle degrees—she's young still—nature and instinct are all on her side—it isn't natural at her age to grieve for ever—well, I almost fancy he might have a chance—he might yet prevail upon her. And if, however slowly, Psyche could only be brought to feel that some new object in life was dawning on her horizon and growing up before her, her eyesight, I believe, would at last come back. All the doctors are agreed as to that: all she needs now is power to make the effort.'

Sirena looked up at him with a vague wistfulness.

'If Cyrus——' she began; then she broke off suddenly, appalled to herself at her own exceeding boldness.

Dumaresq interrupted her with a sudden return of his native haughtiness.

'Mr. Vanrenen,' he said, drawing himself up as if he had been stung, 'is a very young man for whom I have slowly conceived—well, a certain regard, in spite, I will confess, of some initial prejudice. But I most assuredly didn't intend, in what I have just said, to allude either to him or to any other particular person. If you thought I meant to do so, you entirely misunderstood me. It is an inherent, perhaps an ineradicable, vice of the feminine mind always to bring down general propositions to an individual instance.'

He said it in his grand impersonal, kingly manner, like a monarch in his own philosophic realm, dismissing for the moment the *pourparlers* of some friendly power on a matter affecting his daughter's interests. His condescension was so evident, indeed, that Sirena herself—unabashed, wild Western American that she was—felt constrained to answer humbly in her smallest voice:

'I beg your pardon, Mr. Dumaresq. I—I didn't know what I was going to venture to suggest would be likely to offend you.'

She was awed by the solemn dignity of the old man's attitude. In her own heart, she felt tolerably sure he meant to hint, in his obscure way, that if Cyrus made love to Psyche, he, for his part, would have no serious obstacle of his own to offer. But she also felt that, penniless and aged as the great philosopher was, a cipher in the worldly society of rank and wealth, he still considered and knew himself a power in the world—a power of a kind that could hardly bear to stoop to

the vulgar trivialities of Cincinnati pork-merchants. And he made Sirena recognise his position too. That frank and fearless young daughter of an irreverent dollar-worshipping Western Republic yet recognised in her own heart, as she sat there that morning under the weeping pepper-tree, that the gray philosopher in the threadbare coat would be conferring an undoubted honour on her house if he were to admit, however grudgingly, and with whatever reserves, that Cyrus Vanrenen might conceivably pay his court unopposed to so great a lady as Haviland Dumaresq's daughter.

The old man rose, as if to conclude an interview that embarrassed him. Sirena rose too, and moved towards the court, where Psyche was sitting. At the self-same moment, Cyrus and Geraldine Maitland came in sight from the opposite direction.

Cyrus was in a humour particularly disposed to think and hear anything good of Haviland Dumaresq and his daughter; for in truth he had just been conferring a favour upon them. Geraldine had called on her weekly errand of paying the other half of Mrs. Holliday's bill, for which Cyrus unobtrusively supplied the money. To him it was nothing—less than nothing, for he was really one of the richest men in Cincinnati: if out of the superfluity of his wealth he could do anything to make Haviland Dumaresq or his daughter the happier, he was ready with all good-will to do it, not letting his left hand know what his right hand was doing. Americans are more public-spirited in the use of their money than we are; and Cyrus took to himself no special credit for this graceful act. Society and the world, he had been told, owed Haviland Dumaresq an immense debt: and part of that debt, by the favour of circumstances, he, Cyrus Vanrenen, was privileged to discharge for it. It was one of the many advantages of wealth that money could so bring him into pleasing personal relations, however one-sided, with his natural betters.

Psyche, looking up, was dimly conscious of somebody approaching. She moved aside a little, and made room for the young man on the bench. Cyrus noted the natural courtesy with keen pleasure. She wanted him to sit beside her, then! And she so very high-toned! Such a singular honour from Haviland Dumaresq's daughter!

They sat and watched out the set together, Psyche seeing nothing, and Cyrus talking gaily enough to her about nothing in particular. Yet she listened gracefully. The full-flowing murmur of his trivialities soothed her. Mr. Vanrenen was always so kind and nice: she liked him so much for his simple good-nature.

As they sat there talking idly, Corona brought out a letter with an American stamp on it. Cyrus tore open the envelope and read its contents with a faint puckering of his eyebrows.

'Business slack?' Corona inquired with obvious interest.

'Well, the old man writes the market's feverish,' Cyrus answered, with a faint flush of ingenuous shame. He had never felt ashamed of pork in his life before—in Cincinnati, pork is as fashionable as cotton in Manchester or cutlery in Sheffield—but in Psyche's presence he was vaguely aware of something ludicrously common-place about that Ohio staple. To hide his confusion he murmured once more—'East-bound freight-rates restored from Chicawgo.'

'Is that so?' Corona cried, with much meaning.

'That *is* so,' Cyrus replied; 'and, what's more, Futures in lard are described as nervous.'

'You don't tell!' Corona murmured sympathetically.

Like all Western girls, she was a born gambler. She had ventured her own little pile on Futures.

'Yes, I do,' her brother responded; 'and there's a Corner in December ribs and sides, too—a very dangerous Corner. January opened at 160, and, without once receding from that first figure, touched as high at times as 172. "The determination to carry the February squeeze through to the bitter end," Eselstein says in his letter, "makes operators apprehensive of what may occur with deferred deliveries." It's awkward—very.'

'And what'll Mr. Eselstein do?' Corona asked, drawing a deep breath.

'Why, I guess the old man'll back the Fifth National Bank blind,' Cyrus answered, smiling. 'He's bound to go it, with such a squeeze as that! It's neck or nothing.'

To Psyche, all this was Greek indeed. Squeezes, and Futures, and Corners, and so forth, meant less than nothing. They were talking, to her, a foreign language. Yet she felt vaguely, for all that, that she was *de trop* just then. She rose, and

tried to grope her way blindly to the house. Cyrus, rising at the same moment, led her up to her father at the door of the *pension*.

'Thank you,' she said, turning round to him with rising tears in her eyes.

She was really grateful for all these little kindnesses. Cyrus opened the door, and ushered her in with a bending head. He looked after her admiringly, as she felt her way with outstretched hands through the darkling passages. Poor little lady! He would do anything to serve her. She was Haviland Dumaresq's daughter—and so very high-toned!

On the steps Sirena met him with a hushed face.

'Cy,' she said, looking up at him, 'do you know what Mr. Dumaresq told me just now? He told me you were a young man for whom he'd conceived quite a regard! I assure you he said so. And I think, Cy,' she went on after a short pause, 'you ought to accept this intimation, and make the best of your position with Psyche.'

Cyrus pondered.

'What'd Geraldine Maitland think?' he said at last, thoughtfully.

Sirena rose to the situation like a born diplomat.

'Why, Geraldine Maitland said to me to-day,' she answered with deep wisdom, "'What a pity Psyche don't take a fancy to that dear fellow, your brother!'" That's exactly how she said it. And my advice to you is, go in and try for her, Cy. It's something, you know, to be Haviland Dumaresq's son-in-law.'

'They'd stare some in Cincinnati,' Cyrus admitted, stroking his nascent moustache reflectively.

'And you like her, you know, Cy,' his sister continued, returning to the charge and following up her advantage. 'You must allow you like her. I can see every day you like her better.'

'Well,' Cyrus admitted in an apologetic voice, 'it don't seem natural I shouldn't like her, either—being thrown together with her so much, and she so high-toned. Her very misfortunes make a man somehow feel like loving her. If it weren't for Geraldine Maitland——'

'Geraldine Maitland!' Sirena cried scornfully, interrupting him with a contemptuous twirl of her graceful fingers. 'Well, Cy, I'd have thought even you'd have seen Geraldine Maitland don't sit on the same rail with Psyche, any way. And ever since Psyche came to the house, you've been getting to think more and more of Psyche, and less and less of Geraldine Maitland.'

'That's so, too,' Cyrus assented unreservedly, after a moment's thought. 'That's good psychology, as Mr. Dumaresq would say. It's no use crying for the moon, you see, Reeney. So I don't deny, one scale's been going up, and the other down, ever since Miss Dumaresq came here.'

'Very well, then,' Sirena said, with an imperious air. 'Let 'em balance straight, and go ahead, Cyrus. Just you catch on to Psyche, now you've got the chance, and don't go crying over spilt milk any more with Geraldine Maitland.'

Her advice seemed wise. So for the next three months, accordingly, Cyrus Vanrenen was Psyche Dumaresq's most devoted slave. The simple-hearted, generous, whole-souled young American, having once taken her up, fell easily in love with her, if, indeed, he hadn't been more than half in love with her already. He had really persuaded himself now—so blind is youth—that if Psyche could only love him in return, her eyesight would soon come all right again, as the doctors assured them. And for the next three months, with this object in view, he waited upon her as assiduously as her own shadow. As for Psyche, she, poor child! accepted his gentle squiring, all unconscious of its aim, yet not without gratitude. A hand to guide her was a comfort in these dark days; for Psyche herself never doubted now the terrible truth that the end of it all must be total blindness.

Yet when Sirena told Geraldine Maitland the result of her little plot upon Cyrus's heart—a plot already concocted between them in strict confidence—Geraldine's face, to her surprise, fell somewhat. She stifled a sigh, like a woman that she was (and therefore illogical), as if it hardly pleased her to hear that the lover she had taken such pains to shuffle off could give her up in favour of Psyche quite so readily.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

A VISION OF THE NIGHT.

All is not lost even when things look blackest on the surface. About those same days—while Psyche was mourning her lost love in Algeria—away to the south of the African desert, a belated caravan was struggling along on its way northward, bringing with it two weary and footsore Englishmen, refugees from Gordon's conquered force at Khartoum. Both of them were clad from head to foot with scrupulous nicety in Arab costume, and both were to the outer eye of Islam devout Mohammedans of the purest orthodoxy.

After the final assault of the 26th of January, when those two stray Englishmen had been wounded and left for dead among the slaughtered in the great square, their bodies were taken up by the Mahdi's people, and carried some time later into the rough hospital which Gordon had built, with the rest of the sufferers. There they revived against all hope. One of them, a tall dark man with a somewhat sad Oriental face, spoke Arabic with the perfect fluency of a native; by his aid, the other, of more European-looking and whiter type, had been recognised by the Mahdi's troops as a good Moslem in the Egyptian service, and spared accordingly from the doom of slavery which was the universal fate of the remaining handful of Europeans left alive in conquered Khartoum.

After a month or two of convalescence in the captured city, the two refugees had started with a caravan going westward toward Darfur and the Central Soudan. Considine was right: his companions had escaped with their lives indeed from that carnage of slaughter. But to get away to Europe was a very different and much more difficult matter. Linnell knew, indeed, how impossible it would have been to force his road northward by the direct route to Dongola and Cairo, or even to seek the Red Sea coast at uncertain Suakin. To do either would be to proclaim themselves at once as Christians, or at least well-wishers to the Egyptian cause. Their sole chance of escape lay, therefore, in accepting both Islam and the Mahdi with perfect resignation, and trying to retreat upon the further interior, where the Khalifa reigned supreme, rather than in attempting to open communications northward with Egypt and the infidel.

The painter's plan, accordingly, was to cross the desert by Ideles and Ouargla, and to come out with the caravans that abut at last on the Mediterranean in Algerian territory.

It was a bold design. The notion was indeed both a difficult and a dangerous one. In order to accomplish it, they had to pass through the midst of a fanatical population, lately excited to the highest pitch of religious frenzy by the Mahdi's revolt, and ready to kill at a moment's notice, without trial or appeal, any man even suspected of being not merely a Christian, but even an orthodox anti-Mahdist Mussulman. The slightest departure from the intricate rules of Moslem ceremonial, the faintest indication of ignorance or unfamiliarity as to the endless details of Moslem ritual, the tiniest slip in speech or manners, would have entailed upon them both instant destruction.

Linnell, however, was an old hand at the devices and shifts of Oriental travel: he taught his companion all he knew himself: and by sedulously giving out that they were Asiatic Mussulmans, retiring from Khartoum after having lost their all during the protracted siege, he succeeded in drawing off suspicion from his too dangerous neighbour, who had thus no need to communicate directly with the Arabs at all. To the other members of the various caravans they joined on their way—for they shifted often of set purpose—they were merely Mohammed Ali of Sind, and Seyyid Ben Marabet of Upper India. Mohammed Ali could speak Arabic well; the Seyyid, as was natural, though skilled in the Koran, knew no language at all save his own local Urdu tongue.

On such terms the fugitives had managed to make their way by long, slow stages as far as Tintellust, whence they were endeavouring now to cross the main desert by the accustomed track to Ideles and Ouargla.

Ghastly as all their experiences of Eastern travel had been, this particular march was the ghastliest and most dangerous of any. Suspicion closed in upon them, they knew not why. The nearer they came to Christian rule the more did their companions appear to distrust them. On one particular night, during that terrible march, the camels had all been arranged for the evening, the Arabs were all resting in their places in the tents, and the two Europeans in a remote corner sat chatting together wearily and in doubt about their further progress.

'Austen,' Linnell began, in a very common-place and natural tone, dissembling his feelings, 'don't look at me as if I were saying anything the least out of the way, and don't speak as if you were at all alarmed or suspicious; but there's danger

ahead. Things are coming to a crisis. I've been expecting it daily for some time past, and now I'm sure it's actually upon us. You made one or two mistakes in the mid-day prayers, I observed, to-day: omitted to turn to Mecca after the last clause of the Litany of the Faithful—and the Sheikh, I'm sure, suspects you of being a Christian.'

'You don't really think so?' Sir Austen answered, making his tone seem as simple and unconcerned as possible, in spite of the alarm this announcement inspired, for fear the Arabs should notice they were talking secrets together.

'Yes, I do,' Linnell replied, as jauntily as before. 'The position's critical: extremely critical. We must be very cautious how we proceed in future. A word, a look, a movement may lose us all. There's another caravan gone on, you know, towards Ideles yesterday. If only we could slink away safely to that one, where we're not known, we might avoid any further suspicion for the present. But here we shall be watched with a thousand eyes, and the tiniest new error will seal our death-warrant.'

Sir Austen pretended to look idly around.

'What do you propose to do, then?' he asked, with a careless expression. 'Do you think it would be possible for us to give them the slip, and steal clear away to the party in front of us?'

'If it's done at all,' Linnell answered promptly, pretending to be deeply engaged in discussing the arrangement of his native boots, which he turned over and inspected with minute care, 'it must be done this very night, not a moment later: delay would be fatal. Just look at this hole here. Could I sew it up, do you think? Ah, yes, I thought so. The fastest camels have done comparatively little for their powers to-day. If we took them out by three in the morning they'd be fresh enough for our purpose, and we might get such a start that the caravan people could never overtake us with their lumbering beasts; and we could easily make the others believe we'd been forced to fly from robber Bedouins.'

'Shall we risk it?' Sir Austen asked, turning over the boot, and pretending to be engaged in discussing the ways and means of mending it.

'We will,' Linnell answered. 'It's agreed, then. Good. At three o'clock. We've had many close shaves of our lives together, Austen, and I'm almost beginning to get tired of them now; but for one person's sake I'll have a try once more. I want, if I can, to get back with a whole skin to England.'

Sir Austen gathered up his burnous and examined the hem.

'Charlie,' he said penitently, 'this is all my fault. Why trouble yourself with me? There'd be no danger for you if I were left behind. Go on yourself alone, and leave me, if you will, to their tender mercies.'

'No, no,' Linnell answered, hardly repressing his natural horror at such a proposition. 'We've risked it together so many months now, and we'll risk it to the end, come what may of it.'

He spoke as carelessly and as lightly as he could; but his voice even so had a tinge of solemnity that roused the Sheikh's unfavourable attention.

'Mohammed Ali,' he cried, gazing over at him curiously from under his eyebrows, 'what are you talking about with your countryman so much? The servants of the Prophet should rest in peace. It is not well that a noise should be made in the tents at nightfall.'

'I will rest, Sheikh, in Allah's name,' Linnell made answer piously, with an appropriate gesture. 'Not another word, Austen,' he added warningly. 'He's very suspicious.'

'Mohammed Ali,' the Sheikh said again, glaring most ominously at both the men 'come away from your countryman and sit by my side. Let Seyyid Ben Marabet take his place at the far end in the corner by the baggage.'

Linnell knew better than to demur to this order. He rose at once, with a most submissive air, as becomes a Moslem, and took up his place where the Sheikh beckoned him. Sir Austen also stood up instinctively, and moved to the spot that Linnell's hand pointed out in silence. In such a case, implicit obedience was their only chance of avoiding immediate murder.

Reduced for the moment to absolute quiet, Linnell curled himself up in his thick burnous and tried his best to snatch a little sleep, but found he could not. The terrors and dangers of their situation weighed too heavily on his mind to admit of

rest. He waited anxiously for three o'clock to come. He dared not even turn where he lay, for fear of arousing fresh distrust. He held himself in a cramped position for hours at a stretch, rather than wake the Sheikh or the Arabs from their snoring slumber.

Sir Austen was more fortunate. Wrapped up in his rugs, he dozed off for awhile in the corner where he lay, and refreshed himself against the toil they must necessarily endure before morning. But even he could hardly sleep for excitement and suspicion. His rest was very broken indeed. He turned and tossed with occasional low groans. About half-past two his head moved violently. Some strange and horrible vision was sweeping before his eyes, Linnell felt certain.

And so in truth it was. A strange and very unnatural nightmare. Sir Austen, as he lay on the bare ground, curled up in his burnous, and grasping his pistol, was dreaming a dream so terrible in its way that it might well have made Linnell's blood run cold within him had he only known it.

A ghastly dream—cruel, wicked, horrible! On the sand of the desert, in the early dawn, Sir Austen seemed to his disordered fancy—what will not sleep suggest?—to be leaning over a body—a lifeless body—he knew not whose, or how it came there. A great silence brooded over the scene: a red-hot sun: a brown, hot desert: and full in its midst that mysterious body! It was a bleeding body, bleeding from the head. He looked at it close. Wounded: ah, wounded—a great round wound on the right temple. Shot; but by whom? Sir Austen, turning and groaning, knew not.

His dream paused. He slept. Then he dreamt again. The same dream as ever. An awful mystery seemed to surround that body. Sir Austen, gasping in his sleep for breath, was dimly conscious of some terrible remorse, some awful link that seemed to bind his own soul to that murdered corpse. Ah, heaven, what link? Whose it was, or why he had shot it, he had no idea. Face and form suggested nothing to him. All was vague and blank and terrible. But an appalling consciousness of guilt and crime seemed to swamp his senses. He knew only in some dim, half-uncertain way that the man was dead—and that he himself felt like a murderer.

He turned restlessly once more upon his outstretched rug. With the turn came a change. The light of the oil-lamp was flickering on his eyes. It brought a new chapter in his uncertain vision. His dream melted away to an English lawn. His wife was there—that dear young wife of his—and she read him a letter: an important letter. It was a lawyer's letter about some inherited wealth. He hardly understood at first what it was all about; but in some dim fashion he fancied to himself he had come unexpectedly into a great property. Something about a lawsuit with somebody who claimed to inherit the estate. 'Pooh, pooh,' he heard his lawyer say idly in his dream; 'the girl hasn't got a leg to stand upon.'

He dozed for awhile in a quieter fashion. Then he found himself once more crawling on all-fours on the desert sand. The corpse was there, whiter and more horrible to behold than ever. It lay on its face, weltering in blood. A hideous curiosity possessed his soul. He *must* find out whose body it was. He turned it over and gazed on its features. Oh, horror, he could hardly believe his eyes! It was Charles Linnell who lay dead and stiff before him!

Then a hideous truth flashed over him like lightning. Murdered! And by him! For his money, his money!

With a start and a cry, Sir Austen awoke. He sat up in his horror and gazed wildly around. Thank heaven—thank heaven, it was all a dream! He wasn't a criminal! He wasn't a murderer! There stood Charles Linnell, gazing at him reproachfully, not dead, but alive, one finger on his lip, and one on the watch he held out before him. Sir Austen, remembering where he was and how, took it all in at a rapid glance. It was the stroke of three—and his terror-stricken cry had almost roused the slumbering Arabs. In a second he was awake and all himself again.

Noiselessly and silently they crept from the tent, and stole unperceived into the open desert. Sir Austen's heart beat hard even yet with the horror and awe of that strange awakening; but he stilled it with an effort and stole on by his cousin. They cleared the tents, and reached the camels' tether. Thank heaven, thank heaven! it was all a vision.

Yet what awful suggestion of Satan was this that had come to him all unconscious in his dreaming moments? If Charles Linnell were even now to die—— He shuddered to think he could even dream it.

CHAPTER XXXV.

UNEXPECTED.

A week or two later, Cyrus Vanrenen sat one brilliant Algerian morning under the shade of the drooping pepper-tree at the Orangers, discussing with his sister Corona the pros and cons of a serious move he contemplated in the game of life. To the Western American mind, indeed, few things on earth are really serious; but this was one of them. Not, to be sure, that the question of getting married, or of who you chose for your accessory in the fact, could be regarded as in itself a particularly grave one; but when the person contemplated was so very high-toned as Psyche Dumaresq—well, Cyrus felt that to propose outright demanded some unwonted previous deliberation. So he discussed it long and he discussed it earnestly.

'I guess, Corona,' he said decisively at last, 'I'll plunge on it to-day. You must plunge once. After all, at the worst she can only say *no* to me. Come to think of it, that's one of the shortest words in the English language.'

'The question is, though,' Corona answered, very demure, 'if you waited a little longer mightn't she feel a bit more like making a *yes* of it?'

'Well, I don't know for that,' Cyrus answered after a moment's reflection, with philosophic calm. 'A man never knows what he can do till he tries. I've bossed a pork-ring, so I don't see why I need shrink into my shoes before a woman, anyhow. I may be presumptuous—she's so particularly high-toned—but I somehow feel as if she kind of liked me.'

'That sort of girl don't marry a man because she kind of likes him,' Corona answered with prompt decision. 'She marries only when she loves him like—like anything, Cyrus. But there ain't much harm in trying, any way. It *would* be a pretty good thing for the family, say, if we could feel you were marrying Haviland Dumaresq's daughter.'

'It would,' her brother repeated with emphasis. 'Folks would admire at it in Cincinnati.'

So Cyrus made up his mind for the plunge, and only waited for the fitting opportunity.

Now, opportunity, as is well known, comes in time to him who seeks it. It came to Cyrus soon after lunch, when Psyche, groping her way into the garden, sat down by herself on the stone seat in a far corner. She sat and gazed at the deep blue sky she could not see, and listened to the hum of the invisible bees murmuring among the fruit-trees. The low buzz of insects was dear to her now. Sound had come to replace sight. A certain quiet calm possessed her soul. It was the resignation of despair stealing graciously over her.

Presently Cyrus strolled up as if by accident, and sat down quietly on the bench beside her. Psyche made room for him gladly. The good young American was so kind and nice, so thoughtful and attentive, she really liked him. He began to talk to her, as he seated himself by her side in an unconcerned way, as if he meant nothing—merely everyday talk of a gossip sort about the people in the *pension*.

'You like Sirena,' he said at last, in a very pleased voice, in answer to something Psyche had remarked. 'And Corona too. I'm sure you like them. It's a very great pleasure to me to find you like Sirena.'

'I love them both dearly,' Psyche answered with warmth. 'Except Geraldine Maitland, I think, Mr. Vanrenen, I never met anybody I liked so much. In a *pension* like this, one gets to know and understand people's characters so thoroughly, you see. Everywhere else you choose your intimates; here you have companionship thrust upon you, willy-nilly. And it seems to me, the more you know the nice people, the nicer they become; and the more you know the unpleasant ones, the more do their disagreeable traits grow upon you.'

'That's so,' Cyrus assented with a pleased smile. 'And our girls outlive the test pretty well, you think, Miss Dumaresq?'

'They need no test,' Psyche answered warmly. 'They're just charming. Sirena's a dear, and I loved her almost from the very first moment I ever saw her. I think that's generally the way with me. I suppose my instincts are quick, or something of that sort; but whoever I like, I like instinctively; and whoever I don't like, I don't like from the very beginning.'

Cyrus leaned forward with an eager bend.

'And which did you do with *me*, Miss Dumaresq?' he asked anxiously.

Psyche started.

'Why, Mr. Vanrenen,' she said with transparent frankness, 'how on earth could anybody do anything but like you? I don't think it's possible to talk to you once without liking you ever so much. You're so good and true. I should think everybody always liked you.'

Cyrus's heart was in the seventh heaven.

'Thank you, Miss Dumaresq,' he said in a rather low and gentle voice. 'That means a great deal to me, I can tell you: a great deal more than you imagine, I'm certain. Indeed, there's something I want to say to you about that. Ever since you came here——'

He broke off short, for Psyche, anticipating what he was going to say, had risen from her seat with a little startled cry, and was groping her way back toward the *pension* in dismay. Cyrus's tone had told her all. It was dreadful, dreadful. This was something for which she was wholly unprepared. In her deep, deep sorrow, to have *this* thrust upon her! And by anyone so kind and good as Cyrus! It grieved her to the quick that he should have blundered into so sad and hopeless a mistake. The Vanrenens' friendship had been very pleasant to her—the one bright spot in her desert of trouble: and now this painful and unexpected contretemps would spoil all; she could never feel again as she had hitherto felt towards them. She groped her way on, and made blindly for the door. Cyrus, all abashed, but watchful and kindly still, walked by her side, and guided her movements almost imperceptibly.

As she reached the door, she turned round to him, crimson, but very gently. 'Thank you, Mr. Vanrenen,' she said in her soft sweet voice. 'I'm so much obliged to you for your silence and your help. You saw how I felt. That was more than kind of you.'

'And I mayn't say more?' Cyrus asked, half trembling.

'Not at present,' Psyche answered, hardly knowing what she said. 'You—you took me so much by surprise, you know. I wasn't expecting it. Some day, perhaps, I'll tell—Sirena or Corona everything I feel. But not now. I can't bear it yet. Please go, Mr. Vanrenen. There's Geraldine come to have her set at tennis with you.'

Cyrus, obedient as always, raised his hat, though he sorely wondered what Psyche meant. But these high-toned women are always so hard to understand. They don't say what they mean right out: they talk round and round things. Their feelings are more than a fellow can fathom. But you've got to accept them. You must take them on their own terms or give the pursuit up altogether. They won't be anything except themselves. So he turned on his heel, and, descending to the tennis-court, took his seat quietly beside Geraldine Maitland.

As for poor Psyche, much moved and disturbed by this untoward event, she took refuge for awhile, of set purpose, in the little salon; for if she had gone to her own room, she must have burst into tears and cried her eyes out. Her father was there, reading a book on the sofa; and Corona, too; she could just make out a vague blur for Corona. So she glided in, and sank into a seat. Haviland Dumaresq glanced up from his book as she entered and smiled approbation. She had made her way to her seat without much difficulty, and now she was gazing, by no means vacantly, around the room. He was sure by the intelligent look in her eyes that Psyche was really taking in and observing the various objects.

And so, in the excitement of the moment, she really was. To conceal her agitation, to hide her misery, she was looking about her with all her eyes at the things in the room. And what was more, she saw them—she saw them.

A newspaper lay on the centre table of the salon. Psyche could make it out quite distinctly as a dim white patch from the place where she sat on the low divan between the two arcaded Moorish windows. Partly to please Haviland Dumaresq, partly to hide her pain and distress, she made up her mind to try and read it. Her father was always urging her to read, and so was the doctor, and Sirena too, and Corona, and everybody. If only she would rouse herself, they said—one effort of will—all might yet begin to re-establish itself. Well, then, she would: she would do it to please them. With that firmness of purpose which ran in the very blood with her, an inheritance of character from Haviland Dumaresq, Psyche determined that, swim and dance as it might, she *would* make it out—she *would* read it. She would show them all she could at least try hard: she would not be beaten by mere dead circumstance without at any rate one more stern struggle.

After a moment's pause, she rose from her seat again and groped her way across the room firmly. Corona saw her, and,

rising in concert, glided across to take her arm and lead her to the table. But Psyche waved the friendly aid aside with an imperious gesture. She wanted to do it all by herself. She stumbled across the vacant space to the table with doubtful feet, and took up the dim white patch in her trembling fingers. Her father watched her furtively above the top of his book. Looking hard at the title, and concentrating her gaze, she saw to her surprise that she could still make out the big print letters. It was the *Dépêches Algériennes*, and it was dated *Jeudi, 26 Février*. Pleased at her success, she turned back to the window, and seated herself once more on the low divan, where she tried to spell out the matter of the telegrams.

As she gazed at them vacantly, a word in the second column caught her eye on a sudden—a word that no longer swam or danced, but stared at her straight and hard in fast black letters—a word that she could have seen, she felt, if she were stone-blind—a word that burned itself then and there into her very brain.

A single English name!

The name Linnell, as clear as daylight.

She almost cried aloud with horror and surprise—horror, and a certain vague, indefinite fascination.

She knew he was dead: it was the certainty of his death the paper announced. Some straggler from the Soudan must have brought to Algiers the terrible tidings. Better the certainty than suspense any longer.

For to Psyche there was but one Linnell in the whole wide world. What to her were baronets or parsons or British officers? The name must needs be his, and nobody else's.

With a terrible effort, she restrained herself from calling out, she restrained herself from fainting. Cold as death, she concentrated her glance once more upon the paper.

Science was right. It needed but a strong exercise of will. As she focussed her eyes upon the dim white sheet, letter after letter came out distinctly, in blood-red tints, till she could make out the key-words of the sentence easily: they glared at her from the page like liquid fire. They were: 'Biskra'—'Linnell'—'Khartoum'—'Gordon.'

She bit her lip till the blood came almost, and dug the nails of her clenched left hand deep into the palm to increase the stimulus. She was striving hard enough now in all conscience. Her father and the doctors could find no fault with her.

Slowly, slowly, those critical words blazed out more distinctly and plainer still. Line after line gradually arranged itself. The colours only seemed all gone wrong. They glowed so fiercely, like molten gold, she could hardly look at them. But she looked for all that—she looked and shuddered. And this was what she read, in telegraphic French, written as it seemed to her in crimson letters on a burning ground of fiery orange:

'Biskra, Feb. 24.—Arabs from the oases announce to-day that a caravan now crossing the desert conveys a survivor of Gordon's army at Khartoum, cut off by the Mahdi in the course of last winter. From the description given, it would appear that the fugitive is probably an Englishman, whose name the Arabs assert to be Sir Linnell. In effect, an officer of that name is known to have been missing after the fall of Khartoum. The caravan is expected to reach Biskra some time about the 6th proximo.'

Psyche's strength held out till she had finished the telegram. Then she fell back on her seat and swooned away suddenly.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

ONE HOPE IS TOO LIKE DESPAIR.

When Psyche opened her eyes again, she was lying on her own bed in the little blue-and-green Moorish room, and she knew by the sound of whispered voices that her father and Sirena were leaning tenderly over her. But all around was dark as pitch now: not a ray of light, not a tremor of sense, reached at last those great dim eyes of hers. 'I know, my darling,' Haviland Dumaresq said, with a stifled groan, as she looked up appealingly in the direction of the place whence she heard his voice come towards her. 'I took it up and read it. I understand all. But, my darling, my darling, your sight's come back: you saw it! you read it!'

'It's the last thing I shall ever see on earth,' Psyche answered solemnly—'if it isn't He. My eyes are gone now. I can make out nothing. Not a sparkle of light. I'm in black darkness.'

It was the first time father or daughter had ever openly alluded to Linnell's existence since the day of that terrible awakening at Petherton. Haviland Dumaresq made no overt answer, but he leant over her with hot tears dropping from his eyes unchecked upon her face, and held her cold white hand intertwined in his with a fatherly pressure.

'Is it He or the other one?' Psyche cried again, unable to hold her suspense and anxiety locked up any longer in her own bosom. 'How can we find out? Oh, how can we find out? Father, do you think it's He or the other one?'

At that piteous cry, Haviland Dumaresq felt his own heart sink horribly within him. 'My darling,' he said, with a fearful shrinking reluctance, 'I can't bear to buoy you up with a false hope: if the paper says anything, it says Sir Austen: "an officer of that name is known to have been missing from Gordon's force after the fall of Khartoum."'

'Yes, yes,' Psyche cried, sitting up on the bed, and groping with her hand for Sirena to support her. 'But that's conjecture—that's pure conjecture.' Love had taught her logic of its own accord. 'The newspaper knows no more than we do. They can't tell whether it's he or not. The one thing they know is that his name is—*that*: the French put Sir so often for Mr.'

'Perhaps,' her father answered slowly and sadly, unwilling to quench the smoking flax of Psyche's despondency: 'but we can't tell. We can never guess it. We must wait and see. He'll soon be at Biskra. Only, darling, don't let yourself hope too easily, I implore you.'

Psyche rose, and stood up on the floor. Her face was very white and resolute. No staggering or indecision now. She groped her way like a blind woman to the wardrobe in the corner, and took out her jacket and hat by feeling for them.

'Where are you going, my child?' her father asked in blank surprise.

'To Biskra,' Psyche answered, gazing back at him intently from her sightless orbs. 'To Biskra—to look for him.'

'My darling, my darling, it's quite impossible!'

'Papa,' Psyche said, groping blindly towards the door, 'I *must* go. I feel I've got to. I can't wait here for all those days in this terror and uncertainty.'

Sirena seized her two hands in hers. 'Psyche,' she cried, with tears falling fast, 'you can't go. You're not half strong enough. It'd kill you to travel all the way to the desert as weak as you are now. But you shan't wait one minute longer than necessary, if *we* can help it, in this state of suspense. Cyrus and I will go to Biskra right away, and wire news to you, who it is, at the earliest opportunity.'

Psyche shook her head with infinite sadness. 'That won't do,' she murmured. 'I can't stop still. I must do something. I want to be moving. I want to be in action, or else I shall die. And besides, if it's really and truly He, I want to be there on the spot to welcome him.'

Her eyes as she spoke were dry and tearless. The contrast between her words and her impassive face was terrible to behold. Sirena forced her gently back into an easy-chair. 'Cry! darling,' she exclaimed imploringly. 'Cry, cry, and that'll relieve you! I wanted to have you for my very own sister; but now I'd most give my very life up, if only I could make it be that other man come to take you away from Cyrus. He and I'll go to Biskra right away to find him, and never rest till

we've news to tell you.'

As she spoke, with a sudden burst of emotion, the relief of tears came to Psyche. Sirena's sympathy had broken the spell. Her hand had opened the sealed fountain. The poor child flung herself back in the easy-chair and sobbed and moaned like one whose heart is broken. Hoping against hope, she could hardly believe it was really Linnell. She couldn't wait: she couldn't wait. The long delay would almost kill her. And disappointment at its end would kill her inevitably.

They reasoned with her long, but she wouldn't listen. It was impossible in such a state as hers to go: the journey was long: her nerves were shattered. But Psyche, a Dumaresq born that she was, remained like adamant. To one thing alone she returned at each assault. She must and would go to Biskra.

At last Haviland Dumaresq, beside himself with remorse, almost gave way. Her earnestness was so great that he dared not refuse her. He consented against his better judgment: 'You may go, then, Psyche.' At that, Psyche rose once more from her chair. As she did so, she staggered and almost fell. She had used up her small remaining strength in the argument. A great horror seemed to come over her all at once. 'I can't,' she cried, flinging her arms up in a passion of despair. 'I'm too weak, too feeble. I can't even stand. Lay me on the bed—papa—Sirena!'

They lifted her up and laid her on the bed. There she lay long, sobbing low and quietly. It was a relief to her even to be able to sob. After a great pause, she felt about with her pale white fingers for her father's hand. 'Papa,' she murmured once more, 'do you believe in presentiments?'

'Me, my child!' Haviland Dumaresq answered with a start. 'No, no, decidedly. No thought or feeling of any human being is worth anything at all as a matter of evidence, except it be the outcome of direct intimation received by the ordinary channels of sense in touch, or sight, or smell, or hearing.'

'Papa,' Psyche went on, with unnatural calmness, never heeding his disclaimer, 'I think, in certain states of mind, one sees and feels internally somehow. I have a presentiment that it isn't Him. It's the other man, the cousin. And He's really dead. As I tried to rise from my chair that moment, a flash came over me. I had a strange sense that I saw him lying dead on the sand—alone and bleeding—away in the desert.'

She said it so solemnly, in the full force of some strange internal conviction pressing itself upon her, as such convictions will at certain times, that for a few seconds nobody spoke. They were overawed by the profound and unearthly certainty of her calm tone. Her sightless eyes were straining into space. She seemed like one who can penetrate the secrets of space to the remotest distance.

But Haviland Dumaresq, philosopher to the core, knew it was all mere baseless illusion.

After awhile she turned her white face towards them again.

'I feel he was murdered,' she said with solemn persistence—'murdered in the sands—by some other white man. Somebody who escaped with him away from Khartoum. Some cruel traitor who killed him, perhaps, to save himself. I see it somehow, clearly, in my own mind. It's borne in upon me now. I can read it like a picture.'

'My child,' her father cried, wringing his hands in his misery, 'don't trust these pictures. They're fancy, fancy. Your brain's overwrought, and it leads you astray. We'll send to Biskra—we'll send and find out all about him.'

'I'll go myself,' Sirena said, with a choking voice, swallowing down her sobs. 'I'll go and speak to Cyrus this very minute. We'll set out from Algiers by the first train to-morrow.'

Psyche rose up on the bed where she lay, and clutched her arm hard. 'Not you,' she cried, 'Sirena; I can't do without you. Send Corona and Mr. Vanrenen, if you will; but *you* must stop. I can't let you go; you're so very dear to me. I want you—I want you.'

Sirena stooped down and kissed her white forehead.

'Thank you, my darling,' she said, profoundly touched. 'If you want me to stop on that account, why, Psyche, I'd give up even the pleasure of going to Biskra to serve you; though if they *do* find him, I shall just envy them.'

'They won't find him,' Psyche answered, with the same unnatural quiet as before in her tone.

It frightened Sirena to hear her so calm. She feared such restraint must mean serious mischief in the long-run.

'But if they do,' she said, 'they'll be able to tell him all about you, and that'll be so delightful. I just envy them.'

'If they do,' Psyche cried, with something like the old shrinking reserve coming over her with a rush, 'they mustn't tell him anything, not even that I'm here at all. If he's alive, how do I know he even remembers me? All I want is to know he isn't dead. To me he was, oh! so much, so much. But to him, perhaps, I was never really anything.'

She turned and moaned inarticulately on the bed. Shame and despair divided her soul. Then she felt once more for Sirena's hand.

'And if they don't,' she cried, grasping it convulsively, 'I shall want you here; I shall want you to help me bear the news; I shall want you to hold my head while I die; I shall want you to give me a last, last kiss, next to yours, father.'

The American girl stood and held her own bosom tight to keep it from bursting. Neither of them could answer her a single word. They felt what she said was only too true. They knew in their hearts evil news must kill her.

Sirena tried to disengage her hand.

'Where are you going?' Psyche asked, with quick perception of her intended movement.

'To tell Cyrus,' her friend sobbed back.

'Not yet—not yet. Wait with me a little. Do you think he'll go? Do you think he'll do it for me?'

'Why, we'd any of us go to the ends of the earth or cut off our right hands to serve you, dear,' Sirena answered, bursting afresh into tears. 'We feel it's an honour, Psyche, to do anything for you, any way.'



CHAPTER XXXVII.

FROM CINCINNATI.

Meanwhile, Cyrus and Geraldine Maitland were sitting out with half a dozen others around the tennis-court in the valley, all unconscious of the tragedy that was taking place within, so close to where they sat, in Psyche's bedroom. They had played a set on the ground themselves, and fearing to monopolize the court too long, were now looking on and criticising their four successors, or indulging in the cheap recreation, so popular at health-resorts, of grumbling freely at all their friends and acquaintances. Presently the talk turned, as it was apt to do, upon poor Psyche and her chances of recovery.

'Do you think she'll ever get well?' Geraldine asked anxiously, for the fiftieth time during the last fortnight.

'Oh, she's all right,' Cyrus answered offhand, with the easy and unthinking optimism of his countrymen. 'Give her time, and she'll come round right so: in my opinion, it's quite a circumstance. I presume she'll worry over it for a month or two more—women do feel bad about such things, I know—but then she'll get better. In our country we see a lot of these nervous women, and we don't trouble much about 'em, even when they're high-toned. They often seem real sick for a time; but they hang on to life in the long-run, by the skin of their teeth, more than the most of folks.'

'I wonder if *she* will,' Geraldine sighed reflectively. 'I hardly believe it. It makes me awfully depressed at times to see her so miserable. Do you know, Mr. Vanrenen, I'd do a great deal, if only I could, to help her.'

'Why, so'd I, you bet,' Cyrus responded, open-eyed, with naïf surprise that anybody should think such a truism worth uttering. 'I'd be real pleased, you may put your money on it, if I could do anything to be any sort of use to her. But drug stores ain't much good for a case like hers. Time's the only Sequah's Soothing Syrup that'll suit her malady. And I guess it'll bring her round all right in the end. You see, she's one of these high-toned girls that take things to heart a good deal just at first more than most other folks.'

'I don't believe anything'll ever do *her* any good, unless that Mr. Linnell of hers were to turn up again,' Geraldine answered suddenly. 'She never thinks of anything else, I'm sure. She fancies she sent him off to his death; and it preys upon her spirits, and she won't be comforted.'

'Do you think he ever *will* turn up?' Cyrus asked, describing a circle on the ground with his light cane. 'I don't. Sirena told me all about it that day when we came along up from the city with Miss Dumaresq. She told me all you said to her on the subject. And I wouldn't like to lay ten dollars myself on the gentleman's life. They were all cut off, you know—or almost all—by the Mahdi's niggers.'

'I can't make my mind up,' Geraldine replied slowly, looking down at the path. 'Sometimes I think there's a chance of it still—you see, he knew Arabic so awfully well—and sometimes I think the wish alone was father to the thought, Mr. Vanrenen. But I hope even now; and so I'm pretty sure does Psyche.'

But poor Psyche was that very moment absorbed in her own room by that despairing vision of Linnell lying dead in a pool of his blood on the sands of the desert.

'If he does,' Cyrus remarked with a quiet sigh, 'it'll be pretty awkward for me, that's just about all. I'd better go back, right away, to Amurrica.'

'Are you so *very* much in love with her?' Geraldine asked, with a frankness equalling his own—'that you must go back to *Amurrica* if she won't have you?'

'I guess so,' the young Westerner answered without a moment's hesitation. 'I always do like these high-toned English girls, you know, Miss Maitland. I liked you first, because you were so high-toned; I was death on *you*, as long as I thought I'd got a ghost of a chance; and when you wouldn't as much as look at me, and I saw it was no use fooling around any longer—why, by Sirena's advice, I caught on elsewhere, and transferred my affections, intact, to Miss Dumaresq. She's a girl any man might be real proud to marry, that one. And then, you see, her father's quite a prominent author.'

'Well, which did you like best?' Geraldine asked with a dash, turning round upon him so quickly with that strange question that he almost jumped away from her. Could she be piqued at his 'transferring' his affections, he wondered?

'Why,' he answered deliberately, after a moment's pause, for he was a truthful and honest, if somewhat inept young man, 'that's not a question I feel prepared to meet in either direction right away, Miss Maitland. I don't seem to hook on to it as quick as I might. It kind of beats me. One ways, I don't believe in a man crying for the moon; but then, if I was offered the moon at a gift, and no mistake, I might perhaps be inclined to reopen the subject. However, what I say now is, without any comparisons (which are always odious, the copy-book tells us), she's a fine high-toned girl, this Miss Dumaresq, and I do admire at her.'

As they spoke, a little French telegraph boy appeared at the gate, and was walking up to the house in a leisurely way, with a blue scrap of the well-known flimsy official paper carelessly dangled between his thumb and finger. Cyrus looked up and beckoned the lad to come over. 'It's a cablegram for me, I guess,' he said with languid interest. 'Things in Cincinnati ain't been going as smooth as papier-maché wheels on steel rails lately. *Tenez, mon ami*. Just you hand that telegram right over to me, here, will you? "Vanrenen, Orangers;" that's me, I reckon. *C'est pour moi, monsieur*. Excuse my looking at it right away, Miss Maitland.'

He tore the envelope open, and read it with a stare. His face grew pale. Then he whistled to himself a long low whistle. 'Well,' he said, looking hard at it and pulling himself together with an evident effort, 'that's plain enough, anyhow. No fooling around after phrases there. This won't be cured inside of four weeks, I guess. It'll take a year or two to pile that small lot up again.'

He spoke to himself, meditatively and absorbedly; but Geraldine gathered, from his sudden paleness and his vacant gaze at the flimsy blue paper he held before him, that some real calamity had fallen upon him all unawares. 'Nothing wrong in *Amurrica*, I hope?' she interposed interrogatively.

'Well, it ain't exactly right, any way,' Cyrus answered, with a quaint reserve in his measured tone. 'Your American rarely admits himself beaten. 'It's a little askew, I admit: gone wrong somewhere. Just you read that, Miss Maitland. You'll see what it indicates. It's from my partner in Cincinnati, in charge of our business.'

Geraldine took the telegram in her own hands, and read in a bewildered, half-conscious way:

'Fifth National Bank suspended payment yesterday. Pork trust burst up. Firm stone broke. Will cable particulars as soon as I know extent of our losses. Am meeting creditors to-day for first arrangement. Assets nil.—ESELSTEIN.'

'What does it mean?' the English girl asked, with a vague sense of chilly apprehension stealing over her suddenly, though the words in which the message was couched were pure Greek to her.

'Well, it means—ruin,' the American answered with quick returning cheerfulness, continuing to draw circles with his stick on the gravel carelessly.

'Ruin!' Geraldine echoed, drawing back with a start.

'Yes, there or thereabouts,' Cyrus replied, with something like a smile of amusement at her incredulous stare. 'R-U-I-N, I've always been given to understand, spells Ruin. That's how I read it. Vanrenen and Eselstein's the name of our firm. We went it blind on the Fifth National Bank, which was largely interested in the Cincinnati pork trust. Now the trust's burst, and the firm's ruined. Fact is, we put on our bottom dollar. I'm real sorry, and no mistake, for it's an awkward event. It don't so much matter for me, of course; or even for the girls. I can go back, and begin fresh; and a year or two'll pile up that lot again, I reckon. But it's rough on Eselstein, I don't deny. He's an elderly citizen, Eselstein, and he's got a rising family of his own to look after. His eldest son's just graduated at Columbia College, and was going into pork on his own account next fall, if this awkward affair hadn't intervened to stop him.'

'But you haven't lost *everything*!' Geraldine cried, astonished.

'I guess that's just about the name of it,' Cyrus answered coolly, completing his pattern on the gravel path. 'Perhaps things mayn't be as bad as the old man thinks; and perhaps they may: but if they are, why, we've got to face 'em, like all the others. I'm not the only man, by a long shot, stone-broke to-day in Cincinnati, any way.'

They paused for a moment; and Cyrus, a little more discomposed now, crumpled the telegram nervously in his trembling fingers. Then he said with a jerk:

'It's lucky, as it happens, Miss Dumaresq hadn't—acceded to my wishes before this thing turned up. I'm glad for her sake

it had gone no further. It might have made her father feel quite uncomfortable if she'd accepted a man who, as it turns out, wasn't worth the paper he was written on.'

Geraldine looked up at him with undisguised admiration.

'Very few men,' she said, with a burst of spontaneity, 'would have thought of *that* at such a moment, Mr. Vanrenen.'

'No, wouldn't they, though?' the Westerner answered with a naïve surprise. 'Well, now, it just seemed to me about the most natural idea a man could hit upon.'

'There is an answer, monsieur?' the French boy asked, standing by all this time, bareheaded and expectant.

'Well, no,' Cyrus replied in English, putting his hand inquiringly into his waistcoat-pocket. 'There ain't no answer possible, thank you, mister, as far as I'm aware—but there's a franc for you.'

At that moment Sirena, white with awe from the scene she had just been witnessing in Psyche's room, rushed out to join them.

'Cyrus,' she cried, in a fever of excitement, 'that poor girl's in a terrible state of mind. Corona and you have got to go right away this minute to Biskra.'

'Biskra!' Cyrus answered in blank surprise. 'Biskra! Why, what's the trouble? That's away off in the desert, isn't it?'

'I know it is,' Sirena answered hastily. 'But, desert or no desert, you've got to go there. Just look at this paper!' And then in brief and very hurried words she told them the story of poor Psyche's shock and her present condition.

Cyrus's face was all aglow in a moment with horror and sympathy. He forgot his own troubles at once in listening to Psyche's. Geraldine couldn't help noticing that this strain on somebody else's hopes and affections seemed to strike the simple-hearted fellow far more profoundly than the crushing news of his own altered fortunes. He listened with evident distress and alarm. Then he said quickly:

'When does the morning train for Constantine start to-morrow?'

'I've looked it up,' Sirena answered, all aglow with the crisis. 'It starts early—quite a Western hour—5.30 a.m. But you've got to catch it!'

'Will Corona hook on?' Cyrus asked, without a single second's hesitation.

'Yes. She wants to help all she can in this terrible business.'

'Very well,' Cyrus answered, moving towards the house. 'I'm ready to start. I can go right off. We've got to see this thing straight through to the bitter end, and the sooner we set about it now, the better.'

'And suppose you find him?' Geraldine suggested with a whitening cheek.

'Well, suppose we find him,' Cyrus said decisively, 'I reckon this girl's got to marry him, Miss Maitland.'

'I hope you will!' Geraldine cried with fervour.

'I hope so, too—for her sake. Oh, say, Sirena! here's a telegram the old man's sent me from Cincinnati. Make your mind up for bad news from home, my dear. It ain't a pleasant one.'

Sirena took it and glanced over it rapidly.

'Well, I presume,' she said, with perfect soberness, after she'd chewed and digested the whole contents, 'this means we must go back, first mail, to Ohio?'

'It does so,' her brother answered with dogged good-humour. 'It means we've got to begin life over again, and you won't get your portrait done at all now with Vesuvius in the background.'

'I don't care a red cent about Vesuvius,' Sirena replied, flushing, as she tore up the telegram into a hundred shreds, and scattered its fragments on the breeze among the aloes and cactuses. 'But what I *do* feel is this—I would like to stop along

and help Psyche.'

'So you can,' Cyrus answered with promptitude, reckoning up internally. 'I guess I can raise enough for that, any way; but all this is neither here nor there just now. The business before the meeting at the present moment is to get started off straight ahead to Biskra.'

Sirena nodded.

'That's so,' she said, and walked back slowly and soberly toward the house.

Cyrus turned and raised his hat respectfully to Geraldine.

'Good-bye, Miss Maitland,' he said, with a pleasant smile. 'Excuse my going off to get my baggage ready.'

Geraldine looked after him with a regretful look.

'Mr. Vanrenen,' she cried in a tone of deep conviction, 'this is positively nothing short of heroic.'

The young American turned towards her a puzzled face.

'Which?' he asked, gazing around in a vague inquiring fashion for the invisible hero.

'Why, the way you all take this blow,' Geraldine answered, quite fervid, growing flushed in the face herself at her own audacity, but seizing both his hands in hers as she spoke; 'and the way you all think so little of yourselves, and so much about this terrible misfortune of poor Psyche's. You're dear good people, every one of you, I declare. I love you all for it. I never saw people behave so in my life before. As long as I live, I promise you, Mr. Vanrenen, I'll never, never, never make fun of you again, you dear good souls, for saying *Amurrica*.'

'No? Won't you, though?' Cyrus cried, holding her hand in his for a second with a faint pressure.

'No, I won't,' Geraldine answered very decisively. 'I like you so much! I think it's so grand of you! I call you a brick! And I hope you'll find this lover of Psyche's!'

Cyrus raised his hat once more, one schoolboy blush from chin to forehead, and strolled away to the door, a ruined man, reflecting to himself, as he went, that Geraldine Maitland was really, after all, a most extremely high-toned young lady.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

ACROSS THE DESERT.

It was an endless journey, that journey across the Algerian mountains to Biskra. Cyrus Vanrenen had ample time on the way to reflect about the fate of the Cincinnati pork trust, and the Fifth National Bank failure. More than once on the road, indeed, weary with delays of the true Oriental pattern, he said to himself with a sigh that for anyone less high-toned than Psyche Dumaresq he wouldn't have undertaken such a wild-goose chase. Which, to say the truth, was doing himself an injustice; for that honest soul would have done as much, any day, for any one else so unhappy and so lovable.

Still, the trip was undoubtedly a trial of patience. The line, in those days, went no further than Constantine, whose beetling crags Cyrus and Corona reached, tired out, at eleven at night, after a weary day's ride in a dusty, dirty, slow African railway carriage. They had no time, however, to look at the wonderful old town, perched like a robber fortress on its isolated crags, nor at the river running deep in its riven gorge a thousand feet below; for the diligence for Biskra left by five in the morning; and after a short night's rest they found themselves at that hour in the chilly gray dawn crossing the antique Devil's Bridge that spans the profound ravine, and 'lighting out,' as Cyrus graphically expressed it, for the desert.

It was their first experience of desert travelling; and they didn't like it.

For four long days they jolted on in suspense, across the mountains and the sand-flats, ever up and up, towards the oasis at Biskra. The road was indeed a wild and weird one, winding steadily upward, between arid hills of white powdery limestone, towards the high plateau of the Great Sahara. Few trees or flowers diversified the way; and those few were dwarfed and scrubby and dusty in hue, as if developed on purpose to match the grim gray highroad. Dust and rock, indeed, formed the staples of the scenery. They halted for lunch at a grimy *auberge* by two desolate salt lakes; and then up into the grimy diligence once more, and across the arid hills again, full pelt for Batna.

They were well into the heart of Africa now. Black Arab tents dotted the hillsides, and caravans of camels, in long weary strings, stepping slow and faint, passed them, ever going seaward. Trot, trot, trot, at a dreary jog, they rattled along all day; and late in the evening they pulled up short, with uncomfortable brusqueness, in front of a dismal green-blinded hotel, in a fifth-rate Frenchified colonial village of barracks and cafés. And this was Batna.

Next morning the same routine began over again. Day after day they rolled on and on, through sand, and dust, and rock, and sun, in the same aimless, hopeless, forlorn fashion. At dawn they started among bare sunburnt hills; at night bare sunburnt hills stretched still for ever in long perspective before them. They seemed to go all the time from nowhere to nowhere. Only, as they went, the desert grew drearier and ever drearier, and Corona's heart sank deeper and deeper. By the third day the abomination of desolation spread everywhere around them. The soil gaped in great valleys of sand. Deep in the fissures below they could see the dry beds of prehistoric streams that drained into seas now dead and forgotten. The caravans here passed more and more frequently; but Cyrus and Corona cared little to observe the tall gray sheikhs in their white burnouses, or the women with their faces picturesquely tattooed, and their arms and throats heavily laden with barbaric jewellery. Not even the little children, playing naked in the sand with their bronzed limbs, could tempt them to look out any longer from those dusty windows. They had fallen into the lethargy of desert travel, and cared only to hurry on at such full speed as weary horses could effect to Biskra. Their one wish was to relieve Psyche from that terrible strain of suspense and agony.

At last the very road itself failed them. The diligence began to thread its way by some strange instinct across a trackless sandy plain, covered with naked brush, and strewn here and there with monstrous rounded boulders. On, and on, and ever on, starting in the morning from the middle of Nowhere, and pulling up at night in the self-same spot, to all appearances, they trudged through that monotonous sea of sand till the fourth day was fairly over. The fourth night came on, but still the sea of sand spread everywhere limitless around them. Corona leaned back in her place and dozed. How long, she knew not. She woke with a start. What was this? A jolt, a jerk, a stoppage! She jumped up, half expecting to find they were upset in the desert. Had Bedouins come to demand their money or their life? But no. Strange change! They were rattling along a broad paved street. Around were lights, noises, human habitations. Cyrus put out his head at the door. Yes—no mistake this time. It was really Biskra. The diligence drew up with a sudden pull at the door of a hotel, simple, but European-looking. The transition was marvellous. They had crossed for four days the outskirts of the desert, and they woke up now to find themselves still within touch of civilization on the tiled vestibule of the Hôtel du Sahara.

All the way along, as they dashed and jolted over the desert plain, one thought alone had been uppermost in their minds—would they find Linnell when they got to Biskra? And now, as they descended, weary and dusty, from that rumbling stage-coach into the cool white corridor, the first question that rose instinctively to Cyrus's lips, in very imperfect French, as the landlord advanced, bowing and scraping, to meet them, was the gasped-out phrase, delivered with the utmost anxiety and emphasis:

'Y a-t-il un M. Linnell à la maison?'

The landlord smiled and bowed and retreated.

'This way, messieurs et dames—this way to the *salle-à-manger*. *Table-d'hôte* is over, but the restaurant à la carte is still open. No, monsieur, we have no gentleman of that name at present at Biskra. What will monsieur and mademoiselle require for supper after their long journey?'

Eating and drinking were nothing now to Cyrus. He waved the man aside with his hand impatiently.

'No gentleman of that name!' he cried in his despair. 'Perhaps, though, he's staying at some other hotel. I'll go out and search for him.'

'Monsieur,' the landlord replied, with offended dignity and a profound bow, 'there *is* no other hotel at Biskra. *Cabarets*, if you will, *estaminets*, *cafés*—*fonduks* where Arabs and camels herd together—but no hotel: no other house where a gentleman of the distinction of monsieur and his friends is at all likely for one moment to establish himself. Will monsieur come this way to see his rooms? The hour is late. To-morrow the administration will willingly charge itself with the duty of making all possible inquiries for the friend of monsieur.'

'Stop!' Cyrus cried, unable to rest till he had cleared up this uncertainty. 'Haven't you heard whether an Englishman, a refugee from Khartoum, is crossing the desert in a caravan from Ideles and Ouargla?'

'Monsieur,' the landlord said, still polite and impressive, but growing impatient, 'do I not assure you that to-morrow we will make all possible inquiries? Monsieur your friend is not in the town. Accept my assurances. But as soon as we can we will discover his whereabouts.'

That closed the matter for the moment. It was no use arguing. The landlord, good man, was bland, but imperative. Cyrus was compelled in the end to retire, vanquished, to his bedroom.

Supper, to their surprise, was clean, neat, and simple. The hotel, though rough, seemed pleasantly cool and quiet; and they found the beds soft, fresh, and excellent. French civilization stood clearly on its mettle, resolved to create a miniature Paris in the oases of Sahara. But Cyrus hardly slept a wink that night for all that. He seemed to have come the whole way in vain, and to be as far from the object of his search as ever.

Towards morning he dozed, and awoke with a start—to find at last it was broad daylight. The desert sun was pouring in at the window in one fierce blaze of light. He rose and looked out. The beauty of the scene fairly took his breath away. It was a paradise of palm-trees. Great graceful stems rose by thousands on every side, waving their long lithe arms in the air to their own slow music. He dressed in haste, swallowed down a cup of morning coffee, and sallied forth alone into the one long street of Biskra. There he made his way straight to the Mairie of the commune, and proceeded to ask for such information as he could gain about the rumoured English traveller.

His heart gave a jump when the courteous official, who received his request with a smile, motioned him into a chair, and proceeded to overhaul with the usual deliberation a well-worn bundle of green-tape-bound letters. Nothing in France or any French colony without abundant green tape. Cyrus waited and listened eagerly.

At last the courteous official, after much hunting, found the particular docket of which he was in search.

'Monsieur,' he answered, consulting it, with his most consequential air, 'we learn in effect that on the 20th of this month a caravan from the desert did really arrive, much distressed, at Ouargla. In that caravan, as our agents advise us, was a person, supposed to be a European, and giving his name as Linn or Linnell, whom we conjecture to be an English refugee from Khartoum; but on this subject, mark well, our Government has as yet no official information. This person Linnell—as we believe him to be named—is now seriously ill with fever at Ouargla. He will proceed by caravan to this station as soon as our agents consider him in a fit condition for desert travelling.'

'Ouargla!' Cyrus cried. 'Where's that? Can I wire along? Is there any telegraph there?'

The official smiled once more, a provoking smile.

'Monsieur,' he answered blandly, 'here the world ends. Civilization stops dead short at Biskra. Ouargla is merely a frontier post. No mails, no telegraph.'

'Well, but how did you get this news then?' Cyrus asked in despair.

'There are missionary brothers at Ouargla village,' the official responded in the same bland voice. 'They took charge of the invalid, and forwarded the news to us.'

'How can I get there?' Cyrus asked, determined at once to go on and meet his man in the midst of the desert. 'Is there any diligence?'

The official smiled still more broadly than before.

'You can go on foot,' he answered. 'Or you can go on a camel. But there are no roads, no vehicles. For myself, I advise you to await your compatriot here in Biskra.'

In a moment Cyrus's mind was made up. The Western American does not debate: he acts instinctively. Off without a second's delay he rushed to the telegraph office, and sent a despatch to Sirena at the Orangers:

'Man supposed to be one of the Linnells lies dangerously ill at a place called Ouargla. Am crossing the desert on a camel to find him. Mean to reach him, dead or alive. Shall wire again when I have anything to communicate.'

Three hours later, Corona and he were making their trial trip on the ship of the desert, outward bound, with a rolling sea, from Biskra to Ouargla.

Camel-riding is by no means an easy art for a stranger, and they were both beginning to get terribly tired of the pitching and tossing under that burning sun, when, some miles from Biskra, they descried in front of them a long line of patient beasts threading their way with slow and stately tread to meet them over the desert. Cyrus's heart came up into his mouth as he pointed towards the distant line eagerly, and exclaimed in French, with a gulp of surprise:

'What do we see over yonder? A caravan from Ouargla?'

The Arab by his side caught at the words quickly, and, summoning up all his French, replied at once, with many shakes and nods:

'Oui, oui: caravan: du côté d'Ouargla!'

There's something inexpressibly solemn about the stillness and silence of the great desert. Even Cyrus's Western-American mind felt awed for a moment at sight of that long string of gaunt-limbed beasts silhouetted in black against the pale sky-line of that gray desolation. He looked and wondered. The caravan advanced to meet them very slowly. Its camels, Corona could see for herself, as she clung to the projecting pommels of her own saddle, were weary and footsore with their long tramp across the burning sand from their distant station. Most of them were laden with heavy bales, and led by drivers, who walked by their sides with the free bold step of the untamed Bedouin. Their humps were shrunken away to mere bags of skin, that lopped over and fell on their bare sides—the sure sign of a long and tedious journey. But what attracted Cyrus's attention more than anything else was a sort of litter or palanquin, that occupied the midst, borne by four bare-legged M'zabite bearers, and apparently containing some stranger of importance. His heart beat quicker for a moment at the sight. That litter must surely contain—the mysterious Englishman.

'Halt here!' he cried aloud to his Arab driver; and the Arab, accepting the tone for what it meant, with a sudden jerk brought the camel to a walk, and then by slow degrees to an unwilling standstill.

'Does any one of you speak French?' Cyrus called out in the nearest approach he could make to that language from his uncertain perch on the camel's back.

The foremost Arab of the caravan bowed politely in answer.

'Monsieur,' he answered, in what even Cyrus recognised at once for the pure Parisian of an educated gentleman, 'I am a Frenchman myself. What can I do for monsieur?'

'*You* a Frenchman!' Cyrus cried, surprised, scanning his Arab dress from head to foot attentively.

'Yes, monsieur. We missionary priests of Our Lady of Africa dress always thus in Arab costume,' the stranger answered quietly. 'For that, they call us the White Brothers. We have come from Ouargla in charge of an English refugee from Khartoum. We are taking him for a European doctor to see at Biskra.'

In his eagerness and anxiety Cyrus scrambled down boldly from his seat on the camel, and approached the missionary with a perfect torrent of inquiries.

'Do you know his name?' he cried. 'Is he ill? Do you think he'll recover?'

'Monsieur, we do not know his name, because he is far too ill to be questioned yet; but the name on a paper he carried in his pocket is Linnell, we notice.'

Cyrus could hardly restrain himself from crying out aloud in his delight and surprise. But which Linnell? That was now the question.

'I have come in search of him,' he cried, all eagerness; 'I came from Algiers on purpose to look for him. Is he in the litter here? Can I see him, monsieur?'

The missionary beckoned to the M'zabites by the litter, who had halted to observe the upshot of this curious rencontre. One of them, obedient to the unspoken command, lifted up with his big black hand the corner of the curtains that concealed the patient. There, on a mattress, with closed eyes and bloodless cheeks, lay stretched, half dead, a man with a long dark beard, the growth of a year spent in the tropical African interior. The man, who had once been tall and handsome, and who still bore on his face something of the type of the English aristocrat, was evidently very ill indeed. He never opened his eyes even when they halted, nor gave the faintest sign of life or motion. To Cyrus, this suspense was terrible indeed. To think he had found the very man Linnell, whoever he might be, and yet could not solve that last awful question—for Psyche's sake—whether it was the artist himself or his soldier cousin!

The man looked like a soldier. And yet there was something of the artist, too, in the cut of the features, so Cyrus fancied.

'How did he get to Ouargla?' the young American asked again with profound interest.

Corona leaned over from her saddle in breathless anxiety to hear the answer.

'There's some mystery about it,' the missionary replied, letting drop the flap of the litter once more. 'All we know is this, from what we can gather—there were two of them at first, but one was murdered. So much he managed to tell us in brief when he tottered, more dead than alive, into Ouargla. They seem to have struggled across the desert with a passing caravan; but some difficulty arose, we don't know what, and they got separated from their party, we imagine, some way from Ideles, though we know nothing yet for certain. Then there was a fight—a fight or a pursuit. At any rate, this poor fellow staggered in at last to a friendly caravan, alone and wounded, his burnous stained and clotted with blood, and a couple of flesh-cuts on his shoulder unhealed; and all the account he could give of himself was merely what I tell you—that he had lost his camel two days before, and had come on on foot, for many kilometres, in the direction of Ouargla.'

'He was wounded!' Cyrus exclaimed, aghast.

'Yes, seriously wounded. And from what he mumbles now and again in his delirium—for he's very delirious—one of our brothers, who understands a little English, believes there was some fight either with Arabs on the way, or with a fellow-Englishman.'

'Corona,' Cyrus cried, 'this is our man, of course. We must go back to Biskra, and telegraph to Miss Dumaresq. Will he ever get any better, Father? If possible, before he dies, I must manage to have a few words at least with him.'

The missionary shook his head slowly.

'He may,' he says, 'or he may not. Who knows? Le bon Dieu disposes it. But in any case I think it would be dangerous to question him.'

Cyrus mounted his camel in silence once more. It was painful to remain in such suspense so long; but there was no help for it. They rode back solemnly with the caravan to the hotel at Biskra. There the invalid was lifted with care from his litter, and laid in comfort on a European bed—the first he had slept upon since he left Khartoum in fear and trembling a twelvemonth earlier.

Late that night, as Cyrus sat in the bare small salon, endeavouring to spell out with much difficulty a very dog-eared, paper-covered novel in a foreign tongue by a person bearing the name of Daudet, the White Brother came in with an anxious face, and laid his hand authoritatively on the young man's shoulder.

'Come, mon fils,' he said; 'the Englishman is conscious. He would like to speak with you for a few short minutes. He seems to be in a very critical state, and would perhaps wish before he dies to unburden his soul—to make some statement or entrust some commissions to the ear of a compatriot.'

Cyrus rose and followed the priest eagerly into the sick-room. He would now at least learn which of the two it was. In five minutes more poor Psyche's fate would be sealed for ever. He would learn if it was the artist, or his soldier cousin.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

FORTUNE'S WHEEL.

At Algiers, meanwhile, things had been going from bad to worse with Psyche. Her sight grew daily dimmer and dimmer, and her general health feebler and feebler. Suspense was rapidly wearing her out. The shock, if it came, Sirena thought, would surely kill her.

And yet, at times, almost as if by magic, the poor broken girl recovered for many minutes together the use of her eyes as perfectly as ever. Of a sudden, as she stood or walked across the room, the misty blur that obscured her vision would now and again clear away with mysterious rapidity, and reveal, as in an electric flash, all the objects around with a vivid distinctness that fairly took her breath away. At such moments things came out not only as bright and clear as of old, but with a startling brilliancy of colour and outline that she had never known in her normal condition. The dormant nerves, recalled to intermittent activity for a few brief seconds by some internal stimulus, seemed to concentrate on a single perceptive effort all the hoarded energy of a week's idleness.

It was on the day of Cyrus's arrival at Biskra that Psyche sat in the pretty little salon at the Villa des Orangers, with Sirena's hand entwined in her own, and her father watching her earnestly with those keen eyes of his from a seat on the central ottoman.

'No telegram from your brother yet to-day, Sirena,' she said with a sigh. 'How slow the days go! A week on Saturday!'

'The telegram will come soon, darling,' Sirena answered, smoothing her hair and pressing her hand gently. 'Would you like me to read to you—the end of that story?'

'What story?' Psyche asked, looking up vacantly with her sightless eyes in Sirena's direction. 'Oh yes; I remember. You were reading it this morning. No, dear; I don't even remember what it was about. I don't think I heard the words themselves at all; but the pleasant sound of your voice in my ears seemed to soothe me and ease me. You can't think, Sirena, what a comfort it is, when you don't see, to hear familiar voices humming around you; and yours is almost like a sister's voice to me now already. But I don't care even for reading this afternoon. Where's papa? I thought he was here a minute ago.' And she turned her head round by pure force of habit, as if to look for him.

'Here I am, my child,' Haviland Dumaresq answered in a low voice. 'Don't you feel me quite close? I'm sitting by your side. I won't go away from you.'

'Don't,' Psyche said simply. 'I want you all now—as long as it lasts—everybody that loves me. I didn't hear you, papa. I suppose I shall learn in time—if I live—to listen and hear you. One can't accustom one's self all at once to being blind. It's so slow to learn. I turn my head still, and try to look, when I want to find any one. By-and-by I dare say, I shall remember to listen for them.'

'But you're not going to be blind for ever, Psyche,' her father cried with the vehemence of despair. 'Not for ever, my child. They all say so. The doctors declare you'll get over it by-and-by. It's purely functional, they tell me—purely functional.'

'I don't know,' Psyche answered in a very slow but patient voice. 'It doesn't much matter. At times I see again quite distinctly—oh, so distinctly! though not by an effort of will, as they said, at all. It seems to come to me quite by accident. But the odd thing is, after each time that I see so clearly once more, I fancy it all grows darker and dimmer and blacker than ever. The minutes of clearness seem like the last flickers of a fire before it goes out. My sight is ebbing away from me piecemeal.'

At that moment there came a sharp knock at the door, and Antoine, the good-humoured Swiss waiter, entered briskly with a bundle of letters in his hand.

'The post,' he said, sorting them over hastily. 'Meester Vanrenen; mademoiselle, you will keep that for him against his return. M. Waldeck—Madame Smit—Mees Vilson—Mees Dumaresq.'

The father rose and tried in his haste to secure the letter; but before he could snatch it from Antoine's hands, Psyche, too, had risen and stepped boldly forward, with a firm tread, which showed Sirena at once, in the twinkling of an eye, that a

momentary interval of vivid sight had once more been vouchsafed her. 'Give it to me,' she cried, holding her hand out eagerly. 'I'll read it myself. I can see now. I'm not afraid. Whatever it may be, I'd rather read it.'

'Psyche,' her father exclaimed, laying his hand on her arm with a warning gesture, 'don't try your eyes, if they *can* see for a minute. Spare them, my darling. Let me read it first, or give it to Sirena. Besides, I'm afraid of what it might contain for you. Let me look at it, there's a good girl. I'll see what it is for you.'

But Psyche answered 'No' with perfect firmness, clasping it hard in her small hand. 'I can read now, and I'd rather read. Besides, it's nothing. It isn't from Biskra. It's only from home. It has an English stamp on it.' And she looked at the envelope with almost the unconcerned manner of the old days, when to see and to read was a matter of course with her.

The envelope bore an embossed seal on the gummed flap: 'Burchell and Dobbs, Solicitors, Chancery Lane, London.' So much Sirena took in at a glance, as she looked askance at the letter curiously in her friend's hand.

Psyche broke the seal with trembling fingers: not that the letter could matter much to her now; but everything in these days seemed so fraught with latent and unspeakable terrors. She never knew what a day might bring forth in the present crisis.

As she gazed at it, the first words that met her eyes almost drove her blind again with horror and astonishment. What on earth could they mean? What on earth could they portend? For the letter was headed with lawyer-like precision, 'In the matter of C. A. Linnell, deceased. Probate granted.'

'In the matter of C. A. Linnell, deceased!' Linnell, deceased! Linnell, deceased! Oh, horrible! horrible! Psyche laid down the letter for a moment, still clutched as by iron in her two white hands, but folded on her lap as though she could not even bear to look at it. Then he was dead, dead, really dead at last! The law itself had declared all hope was over. In the matter of C. A. Linnell, deceased! Probate granted! Probate granted!

How it rang in her ears! How it whirled through her brain! How it pictured itself visibly on her wearied eyeballs! She raised her eyes mechanically to the whitewashed ceiling. In letters of blood, half a yard long, she saw it written there: 'In the matter of C. A. Linnell, deceased.' It was printed as in marble on the very fabric of her failing retina.

She turned away in her horror, and looked down at the floor. On the yellow Persian rug she saw it still, a negative image in dark running script-hand. It came out deep purple. It would follow her to the grave, she firmly believed. Linnell, deceased! Linnell, deceased! No power on earth could remove it now from her burning eyeballs.

She closed her eyes, but it floated there still, a visible line of fire amid the thick darkness. 'In the matter of C. A. Linnell, deceased. Dead! dead! dead! So he was dead indeed. The letter pursued her. It crushed her. It haunted her.

She took up the fatal missive once more and tried to read it through; but she couldn't, she couldn't. Her eyesight was failing her again now. Those deadly words blurred and distorted the rest of the paper. She saw the whole as a transparency through those awful lines. Her strength gave way. She closed her eyes and cried. 'Read it to me, Sirena,' she sobbed aloud, letting it drop; and Sirena read it.

It was a long and formal statement by Linnell's solicitor of the disposition made of the deceased's property. Sirena hesitated whether she should read every word, in all its naked official bluntness, with its professional absence of emotion or feeling; but each time that she paused or faltered, Psyche laid a cold white hand on her wrist once more, and murmured resolutely: 'Go on. I can bear it. I want to hear all. It's better I should know.' And Sirena read on, to the uttermost syllable.

'Our late client,' the lawyers' letter remarked, with legal periphrasis, 'had made a will before leaving England (copy of which is herewith annexed), whereby he devised the bulk of his real and personal estate to his sole legatee, Psyche, daughter of Haviland Dumaresq, Esquire, of the Wren's Nest, Pether-ton Episcopi, in the county of Dorset, as a testimony to the profound respect he felt for her father's distinguished literary and philosophical ability.' Their late client, it appeared, had gone to Khartoum, and there, in all probability, had been killed in the general massacre of European defenders after the Mahdi's troops entered the city—absolute legal proof of death being in this case difficult or indeed impossible. The firm had waited for a full year before attempting to take out probate. That was a longer time than had been allowed to elapse with regard to the estate of any other of the Khartoum victims. The late Mr. C. A. Linnell, however, had particularly arranged with their firm that in case of serious ground for apprehension arising, a reasonable

period should be permitted to intervene before definite action was taken in the matter. Under these circumstances they had waited long; but probate had now at last been granted to the executor named therein; and it was the firm's duty, as solicitors to that executor, to announce to Miss Dumaresq that the property devised was henceforward hers, and hers only. With reference, however, to the Linnell estates at large—that was to say, the estate of the late Sir Austen Linnell, Baronet, deceased at the same time with his cousin at Khartoum—it was their duty to inform her that a serious question might hereafter arise as to whether it had ever passed at all into Mr. C. A. Linnell's possession. If Mr. C. A. Linnell, the testator, predeceased his cousin, the late baronet, then and in that case——

But there Psyche, brave and resolute as she was, could stand it no longer. She clasped her hands tight on her lap and burst into tears. She could never inherit her dead lover's fortune. She had murdered him! She had murdered him! She had sent him to his death. And now she knew how much he had loved her. In the very moment of that first great disappointment he had thought of her and loved her.

As for Haviland Dumaresq, bowed and bent with grief, he sat there still, listening and wondering over this strange news, with a horrible turmoil of conflicting emotions, and forming already in his whirling brain fresh plans and day-dreams for poor heart-broken Psyche. 'Give me the will,' he cried, turning quickly to Sirena. The girl handed him the attested copy. Haviland Dumaresq buried himself at once in that and the letter, while Sirena turned to lay poor sobbing Psyche's weary little head on her comforting shoulder.

The old man read and re-read for some minutes in silence. Then he looked up amazed, and cried aloud in a voice full almost of awe and reverence: 'Then Linnell had a fortune of something like seven thousand a year, it seems, Psyche.'

'Papa!' Psyche exclaimed, rising up before him in ineffable horror, 'if you say another word about that unspeakable Thing, you will kill me, you will kill me!'

Haviland Dumaresq turned back with a reeling brain to those astonishing figures. The mad mood of greed was upon him once more, the unnatural mood brought about by those long years of continuous opium-eating. What a fool he had been! and how dearly he had paid for it! To turn away a man with seven thousand a year—a man that Psyche loved, a man who loved Psyche! But all had come out well in the end, for all that. The man had done as he ought to have done—made a just will in Psyche's favour; and Psyche, who loved him, would now inherit everything. He was not without remorse, of course, for his own part in the drama. It would have been better, no doubt—in some ways better—if only the young fellow could have married Psyche, instead of dying and leaving her his fortune. The iron had sunk deep into Psyche's soul: she had suffered much: it would be long before those scars could heal over entirely. But they would heal in time—they would heal in time: all human emotions weaken in effect with each mental repetition. And Psyche would now own the fortune herself. She would own it herself, and marry whom she liked. For in time, without a doubt, she would be wise and marry.

Not Cyrus Vanrenen. Not that empty young man. No, indeed, he was never good enough for Psyche. In a period of trouble, and under special conditions of fear for the future, Haviland Dumaresq had been willing for a moment to admit that vague and unsatisfactory young American—vulgar, vulgar, and bad tone too, though undoubtedly good-hearted—to the high privilege of paying court to Psyche. But now that Psyche's future was otherwise secured—now that the load was lifted from his soul—now that all was coming straight by an unwonted miracle—he had other ambitions, other schemes for his Psyche. No American for her—an heiress in her own right, and Dumaresq's daughter. She could command whom she would—she could choose her own fate—she was rich, rich, rich—and Dumaresq's daughter.

Her eyes, he felt confident, would get well by-and-by. This fit of disappointed love was sharp and critical, to be sure; but she had youth on her side: at her age one can outlive and outgrow anything.

Except, perhaps, a broken heart; and Haviland Dumaresq did not even yet understand that Psyche's heart was really broken.

CHAPTER XL.

WHICH LINNELL?

For the next two days, in spite of his fears for Psyche's health, Haviland Dumaresq lived once more in one of his wild, old-fashioned opium-dreams—without the opium. An opium-dream actually come true at last! Psyche rich! Psyche provided for! Psyche her own mistress in life, after all! Psyche free to choose whom she would; to bestow herself with regal imperiousness where she willed; to carve out her own future, no man compelling her. His waking vision had worked itself out in a most unexpected and inconceivable way! Psyche was at last where he had always wished her to be, and never truly hoped or expected to see her.

It was grand! It was glorious! It was sublime! It was magnificent! What was Linnell's life to Psyche's happiness?

One nightmare alone intervened to mar his triumph. Not Psyche's blindness. That would surely come all right now in the long-run. The mistress of so great a fortune as that had nothing to do but open her eyes and see straightway. His nightmare was the fear lest Sir Austen, if indeed it were really he who lay ill at Biskra, might manage to get the will set aside, and to claim his own share in the Linnell succession. That nightmare weighed upon his spirits not a little. He occupied himself for most of the intervening time, before Cyrus returned, with writing an interminable letter to Burchell and Dobbs about this alarming and distressful contingency.

There was another contingency, too, on the cards, of course: the contingency that the man who lay ill at Biskra might prove to be, not Sir Austen at all, but his cousin the painter. That chance, however, Haviland Dumaresq could hardly fear, and dared hardly hope for. Did not even the man's own lawyers give him up for lost? Had not probate been granted for the will by officialdom itself? Was it likely anything would ever again be heard of him?

Yet if, by any chance, it should really turn out to be Charles Linnell, Haviland Dumaresq felt sure in his own mind that all would be for the best, and Psyche in the end would be no loser by it. For if Linnell left her his heiress when rejected and refused, why, surely when he turned up again, safe and sound at last, he could hardly do anything else than marry her. The load of blood-guiltiness would then be lifted from his own soul, and from Psyche's. Poor innocent Psyche! How much and how vainly had he made her suffer!

So he watched and waited, watched and waited, watched and waited for news from Biskra.

Away over there in the desert, meanwhile, Cyrus Vanrenen, the slave of duty, sat in the best bedroom of the bare little hotel, by the bedside of the unknown sick man from the South, who seemed at intervals delirious and dying. Time after time, reason would apparently return to the patient in a sudden flicker; but time after time, as fast as it flared up, the flicker died out again before Cyrus could make out exactly what it was the stranger so eagerly wished to tell him. For the wanderer's mind seemed sadly terrified and ill at ease: sometimes, Cyrus fancied, he gave one the impression of being haunted by something very like remorse—or might it be only pure panic terror?

All that Cyrus could gather from his rambling talk was merely this: that somebody had been murdered. He recurred over and over again in his delirium to some mangled corpse, which he seemed to behold in his mind's eye, lying unburied on the sand, away beyond Ouargla.

'Cover it up! Bury it!' he cried more than once in an agony of despair, or perhaps of penitence. 'They're coming up from behind! They'll see it and discover us! Just heap the sand above it a little with your hands, so, so! How hot the sand feels! O God, how hot! It makes one's hands sting. It burns one as one touches it!'

Cyrus soothed him gently with his cool palm.

'Come here, Corona,' he murmured in an undertone to his sister. 'The poor fellow's delirious! Come you here and look after him! A little eau de Cologne on his forehead, if you can. There, there, that'll ease him.'

The stranger shrank back in horror at the touch. It was more than delirium. It was the temporary unhinging that often

follows a great crisis.

'How it bleeds!' he exclaimed in dismay, looking down at his hands, his eyes all bloodshot. 'How it bleeds as one touches it! How pale, how white! I can hear them coming up even now from behind! Fiends that they are, if they find the body they'll mangle it and mutilate it!'

Corona drew a tiny bottle from the charms of her chatelaine, and poured a few drops of eau de Cologne on her palm with quiet tenderness. Then she pressed it to his head.

'That'll relieve him a bit, I guess,' she whispered, leaning over him. 'One can see he's terribly anxious in his mind about something.'

'Seems like remorse,' Cyrus suggested in an undertone.

Corona shook her head in charitable doubt.

'More like terror,' she answered, with a scrutinizing look. 'They must have chased him hard. He ran for his life, and just got off with his bones whole, I reckon. These Arabs must pretty nearly have made a corpse of him.'

At the sound of that word the mysterious patient, drinking it in greedily, cried out once more in a wild cry of alarm:

'The corpse! The corpse! I must bury it! bury it!'

'He's stronger now,' the White Brother remarked in French, as the patient clutched Corona's arm spasmodically. 'He couldn't have clutched like that, I'm sure, at Ouargla. The quinine's done him good. But ever since we've had him he's talked this way. He's terribly troubled in spirit about something.'

The patient lay stretched on the bed in a nightshirt supplied by the people at the hotel. His own Arab clothes hung up from a peg behind the bedroom door. A happy thought seized Corona.

'Perhaps his underclothing's marked, Cy,' she suggested hopefully. 'If so, we could see which of the two it is—if it's really either of them.'

Cyrus rose and examined the clothes with anxious care. Not a sign or a mark could be found upon them anywhere. He shook his head with a despondent sigh.

'No good,' he answered gloomily. 'The man's dying. And he'll die without our ever having been able to identify him.'

The White Brother understood the action, though not quite the words.

'*Inutile, monsieur,*' he put in with a decisive air. 'We searched everything. Not a scrap of writing about him anywhere, except the papers detained at Ouargla. *Du reste,* it would be hopeless to expect a name. He could only escape by assuming Islam. Through that fanatic population, so lately roused to a pitch of savage enthusiasm, no confessed Christian could possibly make his way in peace or safety. We wouldn't even venture to penetrate there ourselves. To be suspected of Christianity in such a case is to sign one's death-warrant. A name written in European letters on an article of clothing would suffice to condemn any man to instant massacre.'

'We must give it up, then, Corona,' Cyrus exclaimed, with a groan. 'We can only describe what he's like to Miss Dumaresq; and he ain't like much except a scarecrow at present. But perhaps she'll be able to say, even so, if it's him. We could get the body photographed, if he dies in the hotel here.'

That evening, in the salon of the little inn, a new guest, a big-bearded Englishman, joined the small party of desert travellers. He was a bluff engineer of the rougher type, with much-bronzed face and unpolished manners, who had seen service in South America and Mexico long enough to forget his aboriginal position as an English gentleman. His present business, he told them, with the frankness of his kind, was to explore the desert region, with a view to satisfying himself as to the feasibility of the famous Roudaire scheme for flooding a portion of the Saharan depression, and converting the area into an inland sea. He didn't exactly think the thing could be done, but he thought if only you could float your

company there was a jolly good engineering job in it. Like everybody else at Biskra, however, he was deeply interested in the story of the stray refugee from Khartoum, and asked many curious questions of Cyrus as to the man's appearance, state, and chances of recovery. It was seldom indeed that the little forlorn Saharan town had possessed so striking a sensation; and it made the most of it. Biskra gossip lived for the moment on nothing at all but the name and fame of the survivor of the Soudan.

'There were a pair of them at first!' the engineer repeated thoughtfully, as Cyrus finished his uncertain tale. 'And they ran away from a caravan on camels! *Two* camels or *one*, I wonder? One of them dead, and one escaped! A curious coincidence. Reminds me exactly of that singular story old Juarez told me when I was over in Mexico!'

'What story?' Cyrus asked, anxious for anything that might cast any light upon the stranger's mysterious history.

'Well, perhaps it ain't quite fair to this man to tell the circumstance,' the engineer answered, with a tinge of hesitation. 'It seems like raising suspicion against him without due ground, when, for all I know, he may be all right—as right as ninepence. But it *does* look odd, certainly, this raving about the corpse. Fishy, decidedly. Reminds me to a T of that curious story of poor old Juarez's. Juarez, you know, was a Mexican president: president, they call it, for the sake of the sound: dictator or despot comes nearer the mark—just what the old Greeks we read about at school used to call a tyrant.'

Cyrus nodded a cautious assent, though his personal acquaintance with ancient Hellas was strictly confined to the information contained in Cornell's 'Universal History for the Use of the Common Schools of the State of Ohio.'

'Well,' the engineer continued, stroking his beard with his hand in a contemplative way, 'it was like this, you see. On one occasion, when they were getting up what they call in those parts a revolution—a jolly good riot, we'd call it in Europe—old Juarez had to fly for his life from Mexico City, away across the plain, with a small band of devoted adherents. So he turned out at dead of night and ran for it like wildfire. They rode on and on across the plain of Mexico, hotly pursued the whole night through by the opposite party, till, one by one, the devoted adherents, finding the pursuit a good deal too warm for their sensitive natures, dropped off at a tangent in different directions, and left Juarez at the dawn of day almost unattended. At last the old blackguard found himself reduced, as luck would have it, to a single companion, almost dead-beat, and with the hue and cry still full pelt after them. He told me the story himself, at Mexico, long afterwards. He was a rare hand at a story, was old Juarez. Well, at the end of his ride, as he was nearing a little mountain fort still held in force by his own party, blessed if his horse didn't give way all at once, and come down a cropper on the plain under him. Juarez, in a dead funk, called out to his friend to halt and save him. The friend halted, like a fool as he was, and took the old reprobate up behind him—two together on the same tired beast, you understand—and on they rode for dear life once more, full pelt to the shelter. Presently Juarez, looking back over his shoulder, saw the enemy were gaining on them fast; and, making sure the horse could never reach the gates of the fort, burdened as he was with two riders abreast, he decided like a shot on immediate action.

'"And what did you do?" said I, when he reached that point, just as I'm telling it to you myself this moment.

'"Why, fortunately," said he, "I had the presence of mind to draw my pistol and shoot the other man dead on the horse before me." His friend, you must recollect, who'd risked his own life to stop and save him. "I'd the presence of mind," says he, "to draw and shoot him."'

'My goodness!' Corona cried; 'you don't mean to say he actually killed him!'

'Yes, he did, honour bright, I give you my word,' the bearded engineer responded cheerfully. 'A rare old blackguard, old Juarez was. And what's more, he boasted of it, too, just as I told you. "I had the presence of mind," he said, "to draw my pistol straight off and shoot him." He thought no more of it than that, I assure you. An episode of his life—that was all—to Juarez.'

At the door of her room that night, as she went to bed, Corona paused, candle in hand, and looked anxiously at Cyrus.

'Cy,' she said, 'I don't know why, but I wish to goodness that engineer hadn't told us that awful story about the wicked old Mexican.'

'So do I,' Cyrus answered, with averted eyes. 'It's—it's made me feel uncomfortable, some, about the man on the bed in the room down yonder.'

'I can't help fancying, myself,' Corona went on, 'that this is the wrong one, and he either killed or deserted the right one to

save his own life at a critical point, just like the Mexican.'

Cyrus's face grew gloomier still.

'We ain't got any right to judge,' he answered leniently. 'But suppose it was the right one, though—eh, Coroney?—and he'd either killed or run away from the wrong one? Wouldn't that be worse, almost, in the end, for Miss Dumaresq?'

Corona's honest heart recoiled with horror from the bare insinuation of so hideous a solution. Psyche's lover could do no wrong.

'Oh no, Cy!' she exclaimed loyally. 'It couldn't be that. I'd stake my life on it. I'd bet my bottom dollar against that, any way. If there's anything wrong, it *must* be the other one. Psyche couldn't ever fall in love with a man who could go and do a thing like that, you may be certain.'



CHAPTER XLI.

THE MYSTERY SOLVED.

To Haviland Dumaresq's delight and surprise, Psyche still bore up bravely. Why, it would have been hard indeed to say. Whether, in spite of herself and her gloomy presentiments, she still cherished internally some secret hope that Linnell after all might have escaped from Khartoum and across the desert to Biskra, he hardly knew; but in any case, he was pleased to find her still so buoyant. He hugged himself on the discovery. This trouble would pass over in the end, he felt sure. The mistress of such a splendid fortune as hers must surely be happy!

Poor sordid old thinker! For himself, he would have scouted all ideas of gain; but for Psyche—he was as greedy as the veriest money-grubber in the city of London. Nay, in his own mind, Haviland Dumaresq already gave himself, on Psyche's behalf, all the airs and importance of a wealthy person. Psyche was now a lady of position. He could hardly help letting Sirena feel the difference in his treatment of herself. And even to Psyche he often implied by a half-uttered side-hint that he regarded her as the possessor of a great estate, with infinite possibilities for the future still lying before her.

But Psyche, poor Psyche, only shrank back in horror from the hideous thought, and cried to herself with unspeakable remorse, a thousand times over, 'His money! His money! And I sent him to his death! I could never touch a single penny of it.'

And still she bore up, till despair should deepen into perfect certainty. For her father's sake, and with all the force of her father's nature, she strove to be calm; she schooled herself to fortitude—till news should come from Biskra.

One bright afternoon Sirena and Dumaresq had taken her between them out upon the dry African hillside, where the pine-trees grew green and the broom blossomed yellow, and the chirp of the cicadas resounded from the rosemary. They seated her down on the arid rocks, under the shadow of a tall and flowery eucalyptus. Birds sang and bees hummed, and in the valley beneath the murmur of water plashed among the stickles. The highroad to Birmandreis ran just below them as they sat, and Psyche, looking down at it with all her might, half fancied she could dimly make out a long white line that threaded the valley; for her eyes were almost wholly blinded now, and she never expected to see any more with them.

As she looked, however, and strained her eyeballs, dark objects passed now and then in shadowy show along the white strip, as one may sometimes see reflections from the street thrown up in vague outline on the ceiling through the curtains. One of them, Sirena said, was an Arab on a donkey; another, a cart going in to Algiers with fruit for the market; a third, a group of veiled Moorish women, coming home from their weekly visit to the cemeteries. Psyche could dimly realize, when told, how each object answered to Sirena's description.

And then came a fourth, a smaller one than the rest; and that, Sirena imprudently blurted out, was a telegraph boy from the office at Mustapha Palais.

At the word, Psyche's heart rose up to her mouth within her. She followed the dark spot vaguely along the dim white line.

'He's going to the Orangers,' she cried with a start, as the object halted against a second white blur in the distance. Then the truth flashed across her with a wild surmise: 'Sirena, Sirena, it's a telegram from Biskra!'

Sirena, alarmed at her own impudence, ran down the hill in hot haste and tore it open hurriedly. It was addressed outside to Haviland Dumaresq; but in her flurry and excitement she did not pause for a moment to hesitate over a trifle like that. A question of life and death was at issue now. She unfolded the paper and glanced at the contents. Her heart stood still within her in horror as she read:

'Patient convalescent and quite sensible, though very weak. He gives his name as Sir Austen Linnell, and has come direct through the Soudan from Khartoum. His cousin also escaped from the massacre, and accompanied him on his retreat as far as the desert, but was shot through the heart by Arabs near Ouargla some ten days since, and died without pain. Break the news gently to Miss Dumaresq.—VANRENNEN.'

So it was all over! The refugee was the wrong one!

She hurried back, panting, but restraining her tears with a terrible effort, for Psyche's sake, and handed the paper without one word of note or comment to Dumaresq. The gray old philosopher read doom in her face, but spoke not a syllable, lest the shock should come too suddenly upon Psyche. He took the telegram from her hands and read it through in silence. Psyche gazed up at him with appealing inquiry from those sightless orbs of hers. 'What does it say, papa?' she murmured, gasping.

Dumaresq pressed her hand in his. His eyes were full. His voice was too choked for distinct utterance. 'My darling,' he whispered in a very low tone, 'try to bear up. For my sake, Psyche, don't let it kill you.'

Psyche glanced over his shoulder anxiously at the paper. Her eyes, too, were flooded with rising tears. She brushed them away and tried hard to spell it out. But it was too late now. No effort of will could bring back sight any more to those blinded pupils. Not even her eager desire to know the whole truth—to end this suspense, to face the worst—enabled her to break through that thick black cloud that obscured her vision. The world of form and colour was gone, gone utterly. She could not see even in dim outline. Nothing but darkness rose up before her.

'I can't make it out,' she murmured, grasping her father's arm hard. 'Read it to me, papa. I can bear it. I can bear it.'

Dumaresq's voice faltered terribly.

'I can't read it,' he cried in turn, breaking down in the effort. 'Read it to her, Sirena. I've no voice left. The worst will be better than this suspense she's been living in.'

Sirena read on as far as the words, 'Sir Austen Linnell;' then Psyche's breath came and went suddenly, and she clenched her hands hard to keep herself from fainting.

'And *Him*?' she said slowly, holding up with an effort. 'Does your brother know anything about *Him*, Sirena?' And those dim eyes fell upon her faithful new friend with unspeakable pathos.

Sirena hesitated a second in doubt. Then, in a voice half broken by irrepressible sobs, she went on once more till she came to the words, 'the Arabs at Ouargla,' 'died without pain.'

Psyche drew a deep breath again, and sighed once. Strange to say, she seemed more composed now at the last moment than either of the others. Surely the bitterness of death was past. Compared to her worst fears—her worst dreams of unspeakable Oriental torture—that 'died without pain' was almost comfort.

'I know when he died,' Psyche murmured low, after a short pause—'I had a presentiment. That day when I saw him lying dead by himself on the sands in the desert!'

Her unnatural composure terrified Dumaresq. Such deadly calm at such an awful moment could bode no good. He peered down into her eyes—those deep, clear eyes of hers, and saw they were now tearless as well as sightless.

'Cry, darling, cry!' he exclaimed in his terror, clasping her to his bosom in an access of wild despair. 'Cry, Psyche, for my sake, try to cry! If you don't, your grief will surely kill you.'

'I can't, papa,' Psyche answered quietly, as pale as death, but horribly calm and immovable. 'I cried so much at Petherton—in the nights, alone, when nobody knew I was crying at all—that I taught myself how to cry internally, somehow. And now, when I'd like to let the tears come most, I feel I can't. They won't break through. My eyes are so hard—like iron balls. There's no cry left in them.'

The old man seated her gently on the rocks once more. Those great blind eyes of hers gazed blankly and despairingly over the dark, dark world that stretched in front of her. She had nothing left to live for in it all now. She sat bolt upright, immovable as stone. Her heart stood still like a stone within her. She said nothing, she saw nothing, she thought of nothing. A great numbness seemed to steal over her senses. She wasn't even unhappy in any active sense. She was conscious only in a dreary, weary, half dead-alive way of a vast calm blank spread for ever before her.

She was sinking, in fact, into utter lethargy. Long grief and despair had driven her senseless.

They sat there long, those two others, watching her anxiously. Many times Sirena looked across with a mute inquiring look in her eyes towards Haviland Dumaresq; and each time the gray old philosopher, heart-broken himself and torn with remorse, framed his lips into a mute '*No*' when Sirena would have spoken to his heart-broken daughter. It was better

to let this dazed and paralyzed mood wear itself out to its natural term by pure inanition. Psyche had so discounted her grief already that the final announcement came, not as a sudden shock, but merely as a clear and fatal certainty, where before there had been nothing but doubt and hesitation.

At last, with a sudden return of power, she rose from her seat on the great rock, and moved towards the house, neither seeing nor yet groping, but finding her way, as it seemed, by pure instinct. Her tread was firm and her voice steady.

'Say nothing of all this at the villa, Sirena,' she said calmly, turning round as she reached the road. 'I can bear it all now. I feel stronger already. He died without pain, Sir Austen says. And it's something, at least, to know exactly what happened to him.'

Sirena walked on by her side and wondered. But, in truth, Psyche had no reason to weep. A strange yet natural strength seemed to buoy her up. It was the strength of despair, backed up and reinforced by the strength of duty. Her own life was cut off from her altogether now. She had nothing left to live for henceforth but her father. When *he* was gone, she might fade away as she would, like a withered flower.

CHAPTER XLII.

THE MEETING.

For the next three days the same unnatural peace of soul possessed Psyche. Sirena and Geraldine Maitland, who were constantly in attendance, could hardly understand her strange, unvarying calmness. But Haviland Dumaresq, nearer to her in blood, and liker in fibre, understood it only too well. Psychologist that he was, he knew what it meant—a self annihilated.

When a soul is dead, it doesn't complain; it doesn't grieve; it doesn't even despair. It lives on with a vague sort of vegetative life—a life which stands to the psychical health in the same relation as the state of coma stands to the bodily functions. That was indeed the sort of life that Psyche was now fast falling into.

On the third morning after the final collapse, Sirena received a telegram from her sister, dated from Constantine:

'Sir Austen better, and able to travel. We are all coming on together at once. We shall reach Algiers by to-night's train. Come in with a carriage from the Orangers to the depot to meet us.'

She showed the telegram in much doubt to Dumaresq. How to comport themselves? The old man turned it over in his mind for a moment.

'Shall we let her know they're coming or not?' he asked, hesitating. 'Either way, Sirena, seems fraught with alternative danger.'

'Let her know,' Sirena answered, with American boldness and feminine instinct. 'Say to her "Corona and Cyrus are coming." She'll be anxious to know whatever they can tell her. You needn't mention that Sir Austen's with them.'

'But suppose she should want to go down and meet them?' Haviland Dumaresq suggested.

The events of the last twelve months had so thoroughly unmanned him, that that proud spirit condescended even, for the first time in life, to ask somebody else's advice about his own movements.

'Let her go,' Sirena answered, after a second's consideration. 'It'll do her good, Mr. Dumaresq, even to move. Anything that sort of takes her out of herself is good for her, I opionate. She'll want to hear what Sir Austen has to say. And if she sees him, it'll satisfy her to learn the worst at once. After all, Sir Austen was the last man to see him.'

'I can't bear to tell her!' Haviland Dumaresq cried, recoiling. 'Will you, Sirena?'

With a nod, Sirena slipped from the room to Psyche. She told her the message very gently. Psyche, sitting by the open window, where the sun shone warm on her face, and the insects hummed, and the scent of the great white Japanese lilies floated in upon the breeze, listened with that strange dull calmness still all unbroken.

'We'll go to meet them,' she said simply, folding her hands on her lap in Quaker fashion. 'I can bear all now. I can bear anything. Do you know, Sirena, I felt almost happy in the warm, bright sunlight just this minute—happy like a lizard—before you came into the room to tell me. The light fell upon me till I felt it with my face; and it seemed as if the world were all dead to me at once, and my eyes were gone, and my senses were failing; and just the sunlight and the breeze and the flowers remained, and the noise of insects, and the vague sense that, after all, he wasn't now so very, very far from me. He was farther away, you know, before we knew all. And now, I think, he knows all too—and perhaps he forgives me.'

'You must rouse yourself!' Sirena cried, with a face all tears. 'Oh, Psyche, you must really try to rouse yourself! You mustn't let your life just dream itself away and fade out like that. For your father's sake, dear Psyche, you must try to rouse yourself.'

'I can't,' Psyche answered, moving her sightless eyes quietly round in the broad sunshine. 'I don't seem to have impulse enough left now for anything but this. I like to feel the sun fall full upon my eyes. I can feel it hot—oh, so hot!—on my eyeballs. I'm quite resigned—quite resigned now, Sirena; and I feel somehow that if I were to try and rouse myself, the pang in my heart would come back at once as fierce and cruel and painful as ever. It would come like a spasm, and cut

through and through me.'

'But you'll go down to meet Cyrus?' Sirena cried, with a despairing look.

'Oh yes, I'll go down to meet Corona and your brother,' Psyche answered, with a quiet, half-inaudible sigh. 'I couldn't bear not to go down and meet them. I want to hear the worst at once, Sirena. I think when I've heard it, dear, it'll be all over. And, besides, I want to thank them both so much for the trouble they've taken.'

And she kissed her new friend's hand softly and tenderly.

At six o'clock that night they were at Algiers station, Haviland Dumaresq and Sirena supporting and guiding the blind girl's steps, and Psyche, pale but resolute still, walking firm with unflinching feet between them. After all, she was still Dumaresq's daughter. Though eyes and nerves might desert her at a pinch, that unconquerable will should never fail to sustain her.

At ten minutes past six the train steamed, snorting, into the bare station. As it came, Psyche's heart sank slowly within her. She knew not why, but a faint fluttering possessed her soul. She remembered that fluttering well of yore: how strange! how unexpected! She had felt it more than once—in her happy time—in the old, old days—that summer at Petherton.

She hardly knew herself what the fluttering foreboded.

The train pulled up at the platform in front. Haviland Dumaresq, too agitated in soul to know what he was doing, left Psyche for the moment in Sirena's care, and rushed forward along the line in search of Cyrus and Corona. Sirena drew Psyche gently along, and stopped at last in front of a full carriage, whence two or three people were descending deliberately, with true African laziness, among their rugs and bundles. Corona's grave face gazed out at her ruthfully in the background behind, and Cyrus stood beside her, looking very solemn.

'Take care, Sir Austen,' Corona whispered under her breath. 'Perhaps you'd better not get out just yet. My sister's there, and I—I fancy she's got a friend of hers with her. She's very much agitated. I don't want you to get out too soon and shock her.'

'Shock her!' Sir Austen answered, in genuine surprise. 'Why, what do you mean, Miss Vanrenen? I'm wasted, I know; but I don't quite understand what there is about my appearance——'

But Cyrus would permit him to say no more.

'Not just now,' he interposed, in an authoritative voice. 'We'll explain by-and-by. Let my sister get out first, and then I'll come myself. Good-evening, Sirena. Good-evening, Miss Dumaresq.'

At that name Sir Austen gave a sudden start of astonishment.

'Miss Dumaresq!' he repeated, with extreme incredulity. 'Not—not Miss Dumaresq, Haviland Dumaresq's daughter?'

As he spoke, in a voice loud enough to be heard outside the carriage, Sirena started back with alarm to see Psyche's face, pale as death before, grow suddenly crimson, while a terrible thrill passed visibly like a wave through her whole body. Corona was pausing on the step now, and Cyrus, with one hand outstretched in a warning attitude above his shoulder, was endeavouring to prevent Sir Austen from descending. But Sir Austen, undeterred by his vain remonstrance, burst wildly to the door with incredible strength for a man just recovered from the fierce throes of fever, and crying aloud in his paroxysm, 'It's she! It's Psyche!' rushed frantically out upon the open platform.

Next moment, to Sirena and Corona's unspeakable astonishment, Psyche herself, rushing forward with equal ardour to meet him, lay fainting and sobbing in Sir Austen's arms, in one fierce torrent of outpouring emotion.

For a full minute she lay there still, panting hard for breath, and now once more deadly pale in the face, with the awful pallor of a broken heart too suddenly relieved from an unbearable pressure. Sirena and Corona, taking it all dimly in, but not even now understanding to the full what it really meant, stood reverently by, endeavouring to shade them with their screening bodies from the prying eyes of the other passengers, and too agitated themselves to make any effort at calming the agitation of those two weak and overwrought lovers.

At last Haviland Dumaresq, having walked in vain to the train's end without recognising anybody, turned back in his quest, and came suddenly face to face with the unconscious couple.

Corona noticed, even in that moment of hurry, excitement, and surprise, that as soon as his eyes fell upon Sir Austen, a strange gleam of joy, not unmingled with an expression of incredulous astonishment, lighted up the old philosopher's cold and clear-cut features. He advanced, all trembling, with outstretched hand.

'Why, Linnell!' he cried, in a voice half choked with its own delight. 'You back! You safe! They said you were dead! This is wonderful, wonderful! They told us it was the other one!'

'What! it isn't Sir Austen after all, then!' Cyrus cried, half piqued to think he hadn't really been hob-nobbing these last three days with a genuine unadulterated English baronet.

'No, no,' Dumaresq answered, still grasping the painter's hand hard in his trembling fingers. 'It isn't Sir Austen at all, thank God; it's his cousin, his cousin!'

Linnell turned round, with poor Psyche half fainting still, and supported on his arm.

'Yes,' he said quietly, with a deep sigh of regret. 'It *is* Sir Austen—I'm Sir Austen now: my cousin lies dead in the desert behind me.'

Corona and Sirena stood off, all aghast. Then Cyrus's chance was gone for ever; and Psyche would yet be a real My Lady!

After all, it would be something to talk about in Cincinnati: 'Our friend Lady Linnell, who was once Miss Dumaresq.' And only to think they'd be able to call a real My Lady by her given name, Psyche!

For if there is any being alive on this oblate spheroid of ours who thoroughly appreciates at its fullest value the social importance of rank and title and 'our old nobility,' that being's home is by the setting sun, and his land is surely the great Western Republic.

But Psyche only knew that *He* had come back again.

CHAPTER XLIII.

THE FAITH CURE.

For a minute or two they crowded in silent awe and suspense round poor fainting Psyche, whom excess of joy, too sudden joy, had affected so profoundly as no shock of grief could ever have affected that resolute nature. Then Haviland Dumaresq, half seizing her in his arms, led her gently aside; and the *chef de gare*, perceiving her weak and shattered condition, brought out a chair and placed it for her by the wall with something more than mere conventional French politeness.

'Mademoiselle is moved?' he asked good-humouredly. 'Mademoiselle recovers a long-lost friend? A brother, perhaps? A parent? An acquaintance? May I venture to recommend for mademoiselle some *eau de fleurs d'oranger* in a little water? That calms the nerves; that restores the circulation.'

He brought her that universal panacea of his race in a full tumbler, and Dumaresq, trembling, held it to Psyche's lips. But Psyche waved the sickly decoction away with her hand rapidly, and sat still, fanning herself in a whirl of joy. Her whole soul was divided within her by conflicting emotions. She hardly knew as yet whether she could survive the shock, the terrible shock of finding her painter alive again and restored to her so unexpectedly.

One thing only she did *not* feel—the faintest shame or maidenly shrinking at the way she had flung herself without one thought of reserve into Linnell's arms as he stepped out on the platform. She couldn't tell how, but no doubt or fear remained any longer: she *knew* now, knew to an absolute certainty, that she loved Linnell, and that Linnell loved her. After all they had both done and suffered, the idea of greeting him in any other fashion than that never even occurred to her. Nor, to say the truth, did it occur to Linnell either. For both, in the delight of that unexpected meeting, the past was blotted out at one single blow, and they stood face to face at last rejoicing, too full of joy to admit the intervention of any other smaller or less worthy feeling.

That practical Corona was the first to make a decisive move.

'Say, Cyrus,' she exclaimed, turning round abruptly, 'you've got the checks. I gave 'em to you at Constantine. Just you run and look after my baggage, will you?'

Thus admonished as to the common concerns of our everyday existence, poor crestfallen Cyrus, feeling himself somewhat awkwardly at a discount in this pretty little domestic drama of European life, went off as he was bid to recover the luggage. In a few minutes more he returned in triumph to the spot where the little group still sat or stood immovable, and recommended a retreat to the cabs outside with all expedition. For, to say the truth, they were beginning to attract some whispering attention.

'Can you move, dear?' Sirena asked, bending gently over Psyche with sisterly interest; 'or would you like us to ask some of the depot folk to lift the chair and carry you out to the carriage?'

Psyche rose, abashed at last, from the chair where she sat. 'I can walk,' she answered, now blushing violently, and just conscious for the first time since Linnell's arrival of that alternative aspect of the unexpected episode. 'But where is *He* going to stop this evening?'

'Sir Austen?' Corona asked. 'Oh, we've fixed up all that as we came along in the cars. He's going along up with the rest of us to the Orangers.'

'If I may, Psyche,' Linnell added wistfully.

Psyche made no answer, but looked at him through her tears. Then taking her father's hand tremulously in hers, she walked over with the rest to the door of the station. The Arabs and the porters were already engaged in the usual pitched battle outside for the possession of the boxes. Psyche stood by and looked on, while the two conflicting powers mounted the luggage on the front with many loud cries and shouts of 'Ar-r-ri.'

'We shall want two cabs,' Corona whispered in her brother's ear. 'Let Sir Austen and the Dumaresqs go up alone together.'

Cyrus turned round and gazed with a sudden start into Psyche's face. Psyche blushed: her eyes met his all unawares for a second, and then dropped timidly. Cyrus had not presence of mind to conceal his surprise. 'Why, she sees!' he exclaimed in a tone of the profoundest and most naïf astonishment. 'Have her eyes got all right again while we were away, then, Sirena? She sees to-night just as well as anybody! She walked like an arrow straight out of the depot!'

Psyche herself started in return, almost equally astonished at this new discovery. In the tumult of mingled emotion and internal feeling at that supreme crisis of her life she actually forgot for the first minute or two she had recovered her sight; or, to speak more correctly, she never so much as remembered at all she had lost it. The moment she heard Linnell's voice in the carriage, her senses were quickened to the utmost pitch of effort and efficiency. She knew it was Linnell: she was sure it was Linnell; and at that sudden revulsion, breaking forward in a wild rush of joy, she looked, without ever even thinking of it, in the direction whence that familiar voice proceeded. In a second the disused nervous tracts resumed, as if by magic, their forgotten function. Science was right: it was mere obsolescence. She saw her lover, her dead lover, in that second of joy, as distinctly as she had ever beheld anything on earth in her whole life before.

Yes, Haviland Dumaresq was justified after all. Happiness is the best of all possible tonics. As they rode up together through the crowded streets, Linnell sitting opposite her in the light fiacre, and all the world at once recovered, Psyche still forgot she had ever been blinded. Her father watched her with anxious care. Was it only a false flicker, he wondered to himself, or would her sight come back again as clear and strong and distinct as ever?

Day after day he watched her carefully. Would a relapse come? But he had no need now to watch any longer. The cause was gone, and the effect disappeared as if by magic along with it. For awhile, indeed, Psyche's eyes were a little less serviceable and trustworthy than of old: occasional short fits of dimness supervened: the long disuse and waste required to be repaired by gradual rebuilding. But joy works wonders unknown to medicine. With each fresh day spent at the Orangers under these new conditions, Psyche's health recovered itself at once with the marvellous rapidity of early youth. Algiers was glorified for her into an earthly paradise. Those beautiful walks on the breezy hills, those valley strolls among the asphodels and the orchids and the Spanish broom, with Linnell by her side to take her little hand as she clambered among the rocks, and to whisper soft words into her tingling ear, brought unwonted roses back to that cheek, so pale and white in the beginning of the winter. The joy that might have killed her restored her to life. She revelled in the light, the warmth, the sunshine.

For her own part, Psyche had never the courage to hear from Linnell's own lips the true story of that terrible ride for life across the burning desert, and the catastrophe which had wrought them both so much untold misery. But Haviland Dumaresq and Cyrus Vanrenen heard it all the very next day, in the garden at the Orangers, while Psyche sat happy in the tennis-ground below, with Sirena's hand twined in hers gratefully. They heard how Linnell, in his last extremity, escaping from the camp with his cousin Sir Austen, had been intercepted on the open by a strong body of robber Touaregs, not far from Hassiou, the very spot where, a few years earlier, Colonel Flatters and his French expedition had all been massacred in cold blood. Sir Austen, whose camel was less fleet than Linnell's, seeing the outlaws approach, had urged his cousin to fly at all speed and leave him to his fate; but the painter, incapable of deserting his tried companion after so many dangers faced and escaped together, had turned to his aid, and in his fluent Arabic endeavoured to parley with their savage assailants. The Touaregs, however, cared but little for either Christian or Moslem. They fired upon Sir Austen, who fell from his seat; and they left him dead in the night on the open sand. Then, hacking down Linnell himself with their short swords, they went off with the camels, so that the artist found himself alone in the desert, without food or money, to die of hunger and loss of blood, or be devoured, half dead, by the clanging vultures.

Haviland Dumaresq shuddered as he heard the tale. 'Never tell Psyche,' he cried, with his hands clasped tight. 'She's suffered enough, and more than enough, already. To know how you, too, suffered would wring her poor heart. But what did you do then? How did you finally get across to Ouargla?'

'I was left on the sands alone,' Linnell answered briefly, 'with my cousin's body lying dead before me. A horrible terror seized me lest the caravan we had just left should come up and overtake us, in which case our sheikh would of course

have finished killing what little was left of me. I was faint from my wounds and loss of blood. But there was only myself to do all that need be done. With my own hands, there in the open plain, I scooped a hole in the hot, hot sand, and covered his body over with it decently. After that, I set out all alone to walk northward. The loss of blood had left me very faint: so, crawling and straggling, I hardly know how, failing at times, and dying of thirst, but enduring still—because I wanted to get back at last, for Psyche's sake—I made my way towards Algeria. After two days' floundering alone through the bare sand, dazed and stunned, and half dead with fever, I lay down to die. Just then, a caravan belonging to the Khalifa of Ouargla, who is a French dependent, came by within sight. I signalled with my handkerchief. They picked me up. I promised them money if they took me with them; and they brought me on to their own oasis, where the White Brothers, as you know, generously took charge of me and tended me carefully. But don't ask me any more at present. I can't bear to talk of it: I can't bear to think of it. The picture of that poor fellow lying bleeding and dead in the midst of the desert, with the lonely silent sand spreading wide all around, and the blazing sun hanging all day long in the hot gray sky overhead, haunts me still, and will haunt me for ever, till the day I die, with its horrible presence.'

When he finished his story, Cyrus drew a deep sigh of regret. He was glad Miss Dumaresq should have her lover back again; but he did wish events at Cincinnati had permitted him to stop and see her made into a real live baroness. For Cyrus's views on the intricacies of British nomenclature in the matter of titles were as vague as those generally current in the newspaper press of his benighted fatherland.

CHAPTER XLIV.

'ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL.'

Next day, at the Orangers, Cyrus Vanrenen, with a little stifled sigh of regret, announced his intention of proceeding to Marseilles within forty-eight hours, *en route* for Amurrica, taking Sirena and Corona, in his own words, 'along with him' on his journey.

Psyche looked up as he spoke, with an astonished air. She liked Cyrus, and was grieved to think her happiness, as she imagined, should have brought about so sudden a determination on the young American's part. 'Why so soon, Mr. Vanrenen?' she asked in surprise. 'You surely meant to stop here the rest of the season, didn't you?'

Cyrus hesitated for a few seconds. 'Well, when a man's ruined, you see,' he said, after a short pause, 'I guess it's about pretty nearly time for him to be moving off home to look about his business. In Amurrica, Miss Dumaresq, when an operator loses one fortune on a throw—why, he begins to think seriously in his own mind about piling up another.'

'Ruined!' Psyche exclaimed in the utmost dismay. 'Lost a fortune! Oh, Mr. Vanrenen, you never told us!'

'Well, there!' Sirena put in, with a little deprecating wave of forgetfulness. 'I do declare! what a giddy girl I am! Why, Psyche, we've had such a lot to think about, last few days, if it hasn't completely slipped my memory to speak about Cyrus having dropped his fortune! He's had losses in business, home, you know—very serious losses. He'll have to go back to start things afresh; and Corona and I must go, too, to help poor mamma.'

Corona heaved a gentle sigh regretfully. 'It's come at a most awkward moment, too,' she said. 'It would have been real nice, now, if Sirena and I could only have been bridesmaids—wouldn't it, Reeney?'

Psyche blushed crimson. As a matter of fact, so far as she had yet been officially informed, there was nobody's wedding just then in contemplation. But Sirena, paying no attention to her obvious embarrassment, continued placidly to debate that subject of perennial interest to women. 'So it would,' she echoed; 'and Corona and I'd have been real glad to be able to give you a proper sort of present. But that's all past now, unfortunately, till Cyrus can scrape up another little pile again. Corona and I had all our own money staked, of course, on Cyrus's operations. It's just downright annoying, that's what I call it, at such a moment. I should have liked folks in Cincinnati to see in the *Observer* I'd been acting bridesmaid at a regular aristocratic British wedding.'

'Couldn't you arrange it pretty soon, Sir Austen, so as Sirena and I might stop for the ceremony?' Corona continued, looking across the table candidly at Linnell, whose awkwardness almost equalled Psyche's own. 'You'll be married here before the Consul, of course; and Sirena and I would just love to assist at it. It'd be something to talk about when we got back to Amurrica.'

'Oh, don't, dear, *please!*' Psyche whispered in an agony of shame, squeezing Corona's arm hard with an expressive pressure. 'But it isn't really so serious as all that, Mr. Vanrenen, is it? You've not had any *very* bad reverses, have you?'

'Well, not more serious than being left in the world with the cash I have in hand and the clothes I stand up in,' Cyrus answered good-humouredly. 'The trouble is, I don't see now how we're to get back at all, if we don't get back right off, as we are, before we've spent the last dollar in our pockets. Much as I should like to risk my end cent in seeing Miss Dumaresq comfortably married, Sir Austen, I kind of feel there ain't the same chance for a man like me of making another pile here in Algiers that there is home in Cincinnati. Africa don't offer the same scope for an operator's enterprise as Amurrica, anyhow.'

That same afternoon Geraldine Maitland came over to see them. It was not without regret that Cyrus led that very high-toned young lady to a secluded seat at the far end of the garden, for a last interview. Now that the moment had actually come for parting for ever, Cyrus was conscious in his own mind how great a strain that wrench would cost him. 'Miss Maitland,' he said, blurting it out like a schoolboy, 'I wanted to see you alone a bit before I went. I'm off by to-morrow's boat to Marseilles on my way to America.' He said America, and not Amurrica. Before Geraldine's face, he had schooled himself now with great difficulty to the slenderer and thinner Britannic pronunciation.

Geraldine started, and her eyes fell. 'To America!' she echoed, with obvious regret. 'Is it so serious as that, then? And

we won't see you this side any more, Mr. Vanrenen?'

'Well,' Cyrus answered candidly, 'not till I've made another pile, any way. Things look bad, I don't deny. We're dead broke, my partner and I—that's where it is, Miss Maitland.' He drew a long breath. 'But I confess, though I don't so much mind the worry, I'm sorry to go just now,' he continued more earnestly. 'You see, the girls 'ud have dearly liked to stop a bit over here for Miss Dumaresq's wedding.'

Geraldine's eyes were fixed on the path, and her parasol described aimless arcs among the small gravel. 'I'm sorry too, Mr. Vanrenen,' she said at last frankly.

'You are?' Cyrus cried, brightening up at her sympathy.

'Very,' Geraldine replied, drawing a larger and completer circle than any yet, and then dividing it into four quarters with a painful display of minute accuracy.

Cyrus gazed at her with undisguised admiration. 'Why, that's real kind of you,' he said gratefully. 'You've been good to me most always, I'm sure, Miss Maitland, and you're good to me now, to the last, much more than I expected.'

'When *wasn't* I good to you?' Geraldine asked, turning round upon him half fiercely with flashing eyes. Cyrus was too afraid to look her straight in the face, or he might have seen that small beads of dew glistened with a tremulous moisture upon the lashes.

'Well, as I said before, it ain't any use crying for the moon,' he replied evasively, twirling his stick; 'but I did think once——' He broke off suddenly. 'Say, Miss Maitland,' he went on again, after a catch in his breath, on a new tack this time: 'do you know what I'll be sorriest to leave behind, when I go to-morrow, of all the people and things I've seen in Europe—or rather in Africa?'

'Yes,' Geraldine answered, with unexpected boldness; 'I know exactly.'

'Well, it'll cost me a wrench,' Cyrus said with manful resolution.

'Why make the wrench at all?' Geraldine murmured low; and then blushed bright red at her own audacity.

Cyrus glanced back at her, half puzzled, half overjoyed. She was making the running for him now, and no mistake.

'Well, it can't be helped,' he mused on slowly. 'There's no way out of it. I've got to go. I've got to leave it, cost me what it will. I can't earn my living, don't you see, anywhere but in America.'

'I meant,' Geraldine said, uprooting a pebble with the parasol end, and egging it hard out of its nest sideways, 'why not take *it*, whatever *it* may be—along with you—to America?'

Cyrus glanced sharply round at her in almost speechless surprise.

'Well, I do admire at you, Miss Maitland!' he ejaculated, with a sudden burst of joy. 'But there must be some mistake somewhere. I haven't a cent now to keep a wife upon.'

Geraldine took his hand in hers spontaneously. Her genuine emotion excused the action.

'Mr. Vanrenen,' she said softly, 'I don't care a pin for that. I like you dearly. I always liked you. I was always fond of you. I was always proud of the way you thought of me. But I wouldn't accept you—because of your money. I didn't want anybody to have it to say—as all the world would have said—that I'd set my cap at a rich American. So, in spite of mamma, I wouldn't take you. But that day, you remember, when the telegram came from your partner in America, and you behaved so beautifully and so heroically and all that—never thinking of yourself, but only of Psyche, and forgetting your own trouble so bravely in hers, and doing your best for Sirena and Corona—why, that day, I'm not ashamed to say it, I loved you, Cyrus. And I said to myself, "If Cyrus asks me"—for I always call you "Cyrus" in my own heart——'

The young man looked back into her face with shy delight.

'Miss Maitland——' he began.

But she checked him with a little imperious gesture.

'Geraldine, you mean,' she corrected pettishly.

'Well, then, Geraldine—if I may dare,' the young man repeated, all aglow with joy. 'I don't know how to take this honour upon me; and I don't know how to say I can't marry you. You make my heart go too hard to think. But it wants thinking out. A week or two ago I'd have given thousands to hear it. But now I haven't got thousands to give: I know I can't keep you as you're used: I can't keep you anyhow, if it comes to that. Whatever I've got is all my creditors'. But never mind! I'm the proudest and happiest man alive in all Africa this minute, if you really mean to tell me you'd let me marry you. And if you'll stick to it, Geraldine—there, I don't feel I've got any right to call you so, you're always so high-toned—I'll go back home to America right away, and I'll work like a slave, day and night, till I've heaped another pile as big as the first to come again to Europe and offer you.'

Geraldine was holding his hand convulsively now.

'No, Cyrus,' she said shortly. 'That won't do, either. I don't want that. I want to go with you.'

'You can't!' Cyrus cried in a burst of despair. 'I'd cut off my right hand to make it possible, if I could; but there's no way out. Why, Geraldine, I'm almost ashamed to say it even to you, but I shouldn't have the funds in hand to pay your passage across the water.'

Geraldine clung to him with a half-timid boldness.

'But I can't let you go,' she said, holding his hand tight. 'Cyrus, I love you. I'd never have married you then, when you were rich. I'll work my fingers to the bone for you now you're poor. I'll live on anything we two can make. I'll starve, if you like. But I can't let you go alone. I *must* go with you.'

Cyrus soothed her hand between his own caressingly, and raised it with true Western chivalry to his lips.

'You shall,' he answered, making a bold, wild shot. 'Geraldine, we'll manage it, if we have to go steerage. I never felt so proud in all my life before. I don't know where I'm standing when you tell me you love me.'

What further might have happened at that precise and critical moment, history trembles to say: had it not been that just as Cyrus dropped Geraldine's hand, and leant forward with some apparent intention of sealing his compact by more vigorous measures (which the present chronicler declines to mention), Sirena rushed up, all hot and breathless, and threw an envelope into his lap with a penitent air of sudden recollection.

'Say, Cy,' she cried, in a somewhat panting voice, 'I'm so sorry I forgot it! It's all my fault. I meant to have mailed it to meet you at Constantine; and I put it into an envelope for you just like you see it; but it came that day, you know, when Psyche was so ill, so I stuck it right there into my pocket without thinking; and from that moment to this I utterly forgot all about it. Just now on the tennis-court I pulled out my handkerchief; and there the envelope dropped out, sure enough, after lying all that time in my pocket still, for I haven't worn this dress before since the morning it came: and I'm real sorry, but I hope the telegram ain't a very important one.'

Cyrus unfolded it and glanced at its contents in profound astonishment. As he read, he whistled.

'It's from the old man, Sirena,' he murmured, amazed. 'Just look what he says! One can hardly believe it!'

Sirena took the paper and read it aloud:

'First wire premature. Jay Gould taken over affairs. The squeeze has burst. Ring operations liquidated at par. Fifth National Bank set up square on its legs again. Panic allayed. Business easy. The old house as solid and firm as ever. Hooray!

'ESELSTEIN.'

'Why, what does it all mean?' Geraldine asked feebly, failing to take in the strange Occidentalisms of the telegram all at once.

'It means, my dear, Cy's as rich a man as ever he was a month back,' Sirena answered, delighted, grasping at the full sense with Western quickness. 'And, say, Corona,' as her sister and Psyche came up unexpectedly, 'ain't it just fine? We can stay, after all, to see Psyche married.'

Geraldine's face grew suddenly flushed.

'And so you're really rich again—Mr. Vanrenen?' she murmured.

'Well, that don't tell against me, anyhow, does it?' Cyrus asked, crestfallen, with a somewhat anxious and half-regretful look.

'Not now,' Geraldine answered, a little faintly, though not without a tinge of disappointment in her voice. 'Only—I'd rather, you know, if it *could* have been managed, it had been the other way.'

Psyche looked across at her friend with a puzzled look. But Corona took in the true state of affairs at once with prompter womanly instinct.

'I guess, Sirena,' she observed philosophically, glancing quickly from one blushing girl to the other, 'we two'll be bridesmaids at both these weddings.'

END OF VOL. II.

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Transcriber's Note

Punctuation errors have been corrected.

The following suspected printer's errors have been addressed.

Page 26. European changed to Europe. (distinctly European or African)

Page 32. European changed to Europe. (cultured European surrounding)

Page 32. European changed to Europe. (Some European academy)

There are fourteen original instances of the correct spelling of Europe in this book.

Page 141. intertwined changed to intertwin. (hand intertwin in his)

Page 214. delirum changed to delirium. (in his delirium)

Page 251. Thoroughly changed to thoroughly. (who thoroughly appreciates)

[The end of *Dumaresq's Daughter*, Volume 3 by Grant Allen]