

affable, and gracefully bold—they often turned from the amorous gabble of a stupid lover, to seek amusement from me, and I can still recall the rage of a sentimental youth whose disdainful sweetheart, wearied, angry, or alarmed at the suit he was pressing, broke from him, and took refuge beside me, saying: I shall go to Laurence, for he never makes love.

## Chapter 2nd

The relations which I have described lasted through a series of quiet, pleasant years, devoted otherwise to study, and marked by a gentle growth in the powers of thought and of action. Happy and golden do those days now look to me, though at the time, I was conscious of little more than a vague bien être, sometimes interrupted by deepest melancholy, and a hope of some thing far brighter and better, which methought time must soon bring me, but for which I am waiting still. Thus it is that we begin life in the expectation of positive enjoyment, and look impatiently for the day which shall see us very great, very rich, or very happy. It is reserved for the positive evils of life to teach us that the negative happiness of early youth has in it more of actual delight than any thing else that awaits us; and that, from the toils and responsibilities of active life, and from the satiety of luxurious indulgence, we are fain to turn back, and remember with longing the days in which we were neither oppressed with business, nor worn out with anxiety nor ennuyé by the absence of either.

Yet the struggle from childhood to comparative maturity had had for me its secret agonies, its hours of depression and desolation—of these, I do not speak—I have never revealed them—I have never willingly laid upon another the lightest portion of the burthen which it was given to me to bear through life. Thus far, at least, God has ever been my friend, he has ever given me courage to support it.

It was in the last year of my Academic course that my quiet and harmless life met with a strange interruption. At this time, a handsome and sprightly widow, some twenty eight years of age, had added herself to the little circle of our neighbourhood. She came from a gay metropolis, where her life had been embellished by station and wealth, and, as some said, by a little gallantry. She appeared as something new and rare to all of us, a revelation of some thing as yet unseen and unimagined by us, and I fear

me that maidenhood, with all its tender blushes, seemed to us quite tame and crude in comparison with the ever varying powers and beauties of the all accomplished, fully developed woman. The prettiest of our girls had perhaps the advantage of her in freshness and fragility of form and feature, but on the other hand, her beauty was heightened by her wit, displayed by her toilette, and rendered irresistible by an abandon which was not levity, a tact which was not worldliness, and a self-possession which was not impudence. As one may well imagine, the young ladies envied and imitated her, the young men vied with each other in their adoration of her, and I, occupying a middle ground, admired her at a respectful distance, giving her no reason to complain of either presumption or neglect on my part. But Emma von P. was not to be treated in this way. She was accustomed to see herself the queen of every circle in which she moved. The homage of the least was as necessary to her as that of the greatest, and while one heart remained unconquered by her charms, her triumph was incomplete.

7

One by one, rather in a body, the youths of our division had surrendered themselves at discretion. For her were the flowers, for her the verses and the serenades—it was who should ride beside her, who should drive or walk with her, who should go furthest and labour hardest for her pleasure. For such is the generous ambition of youth, it is who shall give most, and its day dream is to deserve the affection of one beloved by devotion and true service. Men of a riper age are better calculators—it is their business to receive as much, and give as little as possible, and the vision with which they delight themselves is one of fond, beautiful women, driven to distraction by their indifference, and vying with each other in their endeavors to win the worthless love of one who loves himself.

But let me do justice to the heroine-worship of our young gentlemen. I have seen the fools quarrel for the possession of a glove, or a faded flower from her hand, as they scramble for gold and precious stones at the largesse of some Eastern despot—bets were made upon her ribands, and duels were fought for her smiles. Nevertheless, as all human beings are said to esteem lightly that which is lightly got and as women especially are piqued by the indifference of a man and rejoice more in the subjugation of one rebel than in the loyal devotion of ninety and nine faithful ones that need no subjugation, so Emma von P. turned from the crowd of her admirers to

look upon the unapproachable Laurence, whose greatest merit may have been that he seemed to trouble himself very little about her.

8 “Why does he never bring me any flowers?” said she, one evening, when her appearance in the ball room had been hailed by a perfect ovation of wreaths and banquets. A magnificent Camelia from my boutonnière was the only possible reply—it was honoured by a place in the bosom of the fair one, in which, however, I had no desire of succeeding it.

They were comparing several lyrics addressed to her on her birthday—she turned carelessly to me.

“I suppose that you have not the gift of writing verses.”

“None worthy of being offered to Madame von P.”

“He slanders himself,” cried my fellow students: “Laurence is the best poet of his class—if he tries for the University prize, his poem is sure to receive it.”

“There are other prizes worth striving for,” said Emma von P. demurely looking down, and lancing to me a glance fuller of meaning than a thrown gauntlet. I hastily improvised some verses, and wrote them in pencil, the crown of my hat serving me for a desk. She received them triumphantly but having read them, her countenance expressed a certain disappointment.

“They are beautiful, but cold,” said she.

“They are at least sincere, I say only that which I feel, and feel only the little that I know.”

“Then you have still every thing to learn,” said Emma, and bit her lip.

The challenge was now fairly given. I must either quarrel with Emma, or make love to her. The latter would be by far the most agreeable alternative to her, and the most advantageous to me. The incipient attacks were hazarded on the one side, and met on the other, with a skill & caution truly military—I cannot say that the same circumspection characterized all that followed. There is something of coquetry in all human beings, and mine could not but experience a certain elation when Emma repulsed for my sake a crowd of suitors, and when I marked that, in the admiring world of which she constituted the centre, she was seized with sudden blindness, and had no eye, no ear for any but me. My place was henceforth ever at her side in the salon, or in the green-wood. I was her chosen knight, and never have I been promoted to more gentle service. Many were the tête à tête wanderings

arranged by herself, in which the charms of all that is loveliest in Nature, and in woman were combined by her, to give the fair picture the fairest surroundings, to place her image in the innermost shrine of my heart and to gather around every association of poetry and beauty. Long were our interviews, endlessly varied, our conversations. Unlike most women, she possessed the twofold gift of being graceful alike in speech and in silence—her voice was full of music, her words full of power, but when she listened, her features all spoke; and you read the eloquent answer in her eye long before you heard it from her lips, as lightning travels more swiftly than thunder. Gradually the charm of our intercourse deepened, the tone of coquetry grew into that of deepest feeling, and the eyes that had once flashed such proud defiance at me now sought mine with an expression by turns enthusiastic, tearful, even agonized. When we met, and when we parted, her hand lingering in mine, each finger seemed to interrogate each of mine, asking why its pressure was so slight, and so easily relaxed. Often, at the termination of a moonlight walk, or of a long session à quatorze yeux in her little boudoir, she would fix her eyes on mine, as if in earnest interrogation and entreaty—not reading there the response she wished, she would turn abruptly from me, or push me from her, and close the door upon me with a nervous energy bordering on irritation.

9

The epoch of our last collegiate examination had arrived—we were all occupied in preparing for the exercises. Among various prizes had been announced one, to be adjudged to the author of the best poem, and this *concurrency* was to be crowned by the most imposing ceremony of the week of trial. For this, the last day had been chosen, a numerous company would be invited. The rival poems were to be read aloud, each by its author, and the successful candidate should receive the prize from the hand of Emma. The last clause in the prospectus of arrangements gave the keenest edge to the eagerness of the young competitors. They had all envied me the preference shown me by their new divinity, they were all determined to snatch from me, if possible, the crown made doubly precious by her hand. There was great agony of preparation throughout the college, and a sighing and groaning as of parturient mountains preparing to bring forth mice. During the last month of the term, all spoke in rhyme, thought in verse, ate and drank in strict measure. Those who had neither been born poets nor bred orators hoped in a few weeks to possess the attributes of both, not knowing that

it needs a whole lifetime to acquire an art, of which the germ has not been given with life itself. They had each chosen themes suited to their various tastes and studies. I had written my poem without labour, almost without any fixed design—it was but a piece of my every day thought, more neatly fashioned than the crude jottings down which often recorded my soul’s life, and which always spoke of states of feeling, not of events. I had only followed the guidance of the voices which, in those days, came to me at morn, at noon, and with the holy eventide, bringing me as from another world, thoughts and images of thoughts, which could only utter themselves in song.

“Here we are, all talking, consulting, and disputing about our poems,” cried the students one day, “and no one has heard a syllable from Laurence, in any way explanatory of his intentions. Confess now, Laurence, that you have not yet thought of a subject.”

“Not much in truth.”

“Ah! for the first time, you will be behindhand. Know, *gracilis puer*, graceless boy, that moonlight rambles and metaphysical discussions with pretty women will not help you to the Muse.”

“And tears will bedew the nose of the sweet old preceptor when, at the critical moment he shall thus interrogate you: ‘*Laurentsi, ubi est carmen tuum?*’”

“Yet the poem has somehow written itself,” said I.

“Has it so, and already? Then it is probably something brief and personal—to memory, hope, despair, or your mistress’s eyelash.”

“To the blessed wig of our chancellor?”

“Or to his ox, the Latin professor, or his ass, the Greek professor, or to his man-servant the chemist, or to his maid-servant, the old woman who presides over our theological studies and gives us, hebdomadally, a foretaste of damnation?”

“To nothing and nobody,” cried I, stunned by their noise.

“Ah then, to one who is not a thing nor a body, but a heavenly essence, radiance, and effulgence—to the witching Emma?”

“I do not jest about Madame von P.” said I, with some coldness, and turning to depart.

“Is he not shy, this Laurence?” said they, as I left them.

## Chapter 3rd

On the evening that preceded the last day of trial, Wilhelm, a student who might have been my friend, had he not been Emma's lover, came to my room.

"Laurence," said he, "you have passed, thus far, a better examination than any of us. Are you not satisfied with your success? Do you still intend to present your poem for the prize tomorrow?"

I replied in the affirmative. He continued: "I implore you to listen to me. You are sure to receive the prize, and from Emma's hand. But for you, this happiness would be mine, but for you, I should still be as once I was, her favored one."

"As once you were?" repeated I, with contemptuous disbelief.

"Yes, but let me say all that I have to say. You do not love this woman, you have never loved her, you are but playing with her, and here stands one who would peril his life to obtain the boon which to me were blessedness, which to you will be but a trifling and transient gratification."

"What is the end and aim of this discourse?"

"It is briefly this—name your price, and sell me your poem."

"I am no Judas, to sell my soul for thirty pieces of silver."

"It shall be no mean price, my patrimony is large, ask whatever you will."

"If I should sell it thrice over, I could not make it yours," said I, with some haughtiness. "Children will claim their own parents."

"Then thus do I commit your first born to the flames," and before I could spring forward to prevent it, the excited youth had held my manuscript, which lay upon the table, in the blaze of the lamp—he waved it, flaming, around his head until nearly consumed, and then threw it from the window with a yell of triumph.

I stood and smiled upon him. "I will give you your revenge, if you wish it," said he.

"*À demain*," said I, courteously waving my hand, "I am in no hurry about it."

He looked at me in embarrassment and surprise, and was glad to seek the door.

That very evening and late into the night, I sat and talked with Emma von P. Our conversation had wandered hither and thither, as freely as our

thoughts, but these, though widely discursive, ran ever in parallels. She had sung her sweetest, looked her beautifullest, and her discourse had been, as it ever was, full of point and of meaning. We had entered into a playful battle, tilting with golden lances, and pelting each other with rose leaves. At length, we became silent, she from very weariness, while I grew absorbed in painful forebodings. The conviction had forced itself more and more upon my mind that beneath Emma's jests there lurked a deep & dreadful earnest. I had begun to experience a malaise, an anxiety in her presence, for I felt the hidden strength of her nature, and I knew that it would soon be turned against her own happiness, and my peace. It was well, methought, that the hour of our separation was so near at hand.

"We have been very merry, and yet I am so sad!" sighed my companion from her corner of the causense.

"Your ladyship has then a fearful habit of deception, for I have observed that whenever you have been gayest, you turn to me with the smile yet on your lips to tell me that you are so sad!"

"Sadness and mirth are ever as near to each other as life and death," answered she musingly, "and there is always something of the one in the other."

Another pause: "What am I like?" said Emma to me.

"You are like a beautiful flower on an iron stem. The flower will fade, the iron will kill, so that you are mortal in yourself, and mortal to others."

"Thanks for a very bad compliment—shall I tell you what you are like?"

"Most certainly."—"You are like this marble against which I lean my head, whose pulses throb so that there seems to be a pulse in the cold stone itself—thus, a heart that is near you may think to feel the presence of one in you, but it is all marble, only marble."

After a moment's silence, she continued: "How old are you, Laurence?"

"Nigh upon twenty one."

"Nearly twenty one? quite a man then, and still a trifler." Exquisitely touching was the tone in which this gentle reproach was uttered. I durst not betray the emotion it caused me, and my reply was cold and almost rude. "You have always invited me to trifle," I said, "and I thought that it was altogether to your taste, but since you have had enough of it, good night."

Oh, Emma! this should have been our last good night. As I left the house, she called me back. I heard her steps as she ran to overtake me, but

I hastened mine, and did not look back. She returned and closed the door abruptly, but I heard a sob, as I passed near her window, on my way home.

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13

On the afternoon of the day following, we were marshalled in the chapel of the college, for the reading of the prize poems. As we entered, we found the area filled by the members of the junior classes, the faculty of the college, our young friends of the neighbourhood, and some distinguished guests from the castle. At the upper end was the rostrum from which, by turns, we were to make our appeal to the favour of the audience—upon either side of this was a raised seat, on one of which was seated the chancellor of the University, and on the other, as upon a throne, our fair queen of love and beauty, Emma von P. to whom men forgave the pangs she sent to their hearts, for the delight she gave their eyes. It is so great a pleasure to see a woman finely trained and developed in person and in character. Your crude ore is cumbrous to carry, and difficult of estimation, but though Emma bore the guinea stamp of high breeding, she was yet of virgin gold, for a' that.

The compositions were really of a more respectable order than I had anticipated. There was unavoidably some pedantry displayed in the choice of subjects, and the young authors were obviously more familiar with their humanities than with humanity. It is true that we had a disquisition on the sufferings of Dido, and an ode commemorative of the constancy of Penelope, but I have often seen both of these heroines much more unkindly treated. There were several other productions, of which the theme alone could be called classic. A revolutionary poem followed, flaming and captious, at which the venerable Chancellor and other wigs there present winced somewhat. Then came a theological argument in blank verse, dogmatical, ambitious, and exceeding tedious to the young girls, delivered by a youth of pale complexion, red nose, and very indifferent digestion. After these exhibitions, Wilhelm really appeared to the greatest advantage, as he recited with a feeling voice a graceful lyric upon the ever old and ever new subject of love, into the closing lines of which was wrought an unmistakable tribute to the charms of Emma. Universal applause followed his performance. He looked at Emma and at me, and seemed surprised to see a smile on my lips, and none on hers.

“I am the last, at least,” said Wilhelm, with an air of satisfaction.

“You forget that the best and worst is yet to come, here is Laurence—”

Wilhelm hastily replied: “Laurence has no poem.”

14 Emma overheard him, and changed colour, while she stole at me an anxious and inquiring glance.

“How know you that, Wilhelm?” said I—the countenance of my rival was instantly darkened. As my name was called, I ascended the platform, stated to the audience that my manuscript had accidentally been destroyed and requested permission to repeat memoratà, instead of reading my poem. This was granted me, as a matter of course. Then, with a voice of silvery sweetness, and in a measure peculiarly my own, I sang the sufferings of a soul exiled from heaven, and sent into this world invested with the semblance, but not the attributes of humanity. I told of its solitary wanderings on earth, how it could nothing make, nothing possess—how its abstract orphanhood could establish no relationship, and extort no sympathy from the souls of men, veiled in a flesh of whose wants and powers it knew nothing. The alternative was then offered to it of becoming utterly mortal, or of returning to its ghostland, and I closed with some thrilling numbers descriptive of the noble scorn with which the pure spirit refused to bear the unworthy burthen of the flesh, once contemplated and understood, and the free and fearless courage with which it spread its wings, and flew back to the bosom of its God. My audience was deeply and attentively silent, and when my voice ceased, one long-drawn breath betrayed the interest with which I had been heard.

The committee appointed to decide upon the adjudication of the prize did not include (*Deo sit gratias*) the faculty of the college. It was composed of several gentlemen of the neighbourhood, among whom was the well accomplished Baron L——, who was present with several foreigners, his friends, and guests. The committee retired into an anteroom, whence they shortly returned, having been quite unanimous in their decision. The Baron, as foreman of the Jury, addressed the chancellor, and informed him that they had agreed, without one dissenting voice, to adjudge the prize to M. Laurence de ——-. The Chancellor at first replied by a well bred stare and the whole Council of Pedagogues unhesitatingly expressed their disapproval.

“The poem of M. Laurence bears no marks of historical research,” murmured the expounder of Sallust.

“In a theological point of view, it is an entire fallacy,” growled the Doctor Divinitatis.

“There is nothing in it which would lead one to suppose that the author had been thoroughly grounded by me in trigonometry, integral calculus, conic sections, et alia,” remarked the man of cubes and decahedrons.

15

“It is at least highly, beautifully poetical,” rejoined the Baron, in his courtliest manner, “and as we came hither to listen to poems, and to decide upon their merits as such, you must allow me in the name of my friends of the Committee, to announce to the company the name of M. Laurence as the recipient of the prize, and to offer him our warmest thanks and congratulations upon his public desert of it.”

A loud burst of applause confirmed the sanction of the whole assembly upon his decision. Some reply on my part seemed necessary, but I could only say to the Baron: “I have as yet small pretensions to knowledge of any kind. Thanks to you, who have recognized in me the presence of the poetic power.”

Turning from him, I knelt at Emma’s feet to receive the prize—it was a crown woven of velvet oak leaves with golden acorns. I felt the tremulousness of the hand that placed it on my head, I saw by the tearful smile with which she greeted me, that her heart was moved at once to joy and grief. She was proud and happy in my triumph, but that another should have dedicated his services to her, while the poem of her chosen one bore no trace of her, this grieved her deeply. Yet she was alike incapable of feeling or of showing a petty vexation, and when she spoke to her [*sic*], her voice and her words were deeply sympathetic.

“Oh, Laurence, your flight is lofty, and the heaven you dwell in is beautiful, but why do you take no one with you?”

“Could you not follow me then, Emma?”

“Did you expect it?”—“Yes—at least I hoped it. I have often wished to talk with you of the relations of pure spirit.”

“Laurence, I hope that you are not one of those unsexed souls.”

“Have you never been one?” said I.

“Never,” she replied, “since I have learned what it is to be a woman.”

These words made a strong impression upon me—“what is it to be a woman?” I asked of myself: “It is obviously a matter of which I have small conception.”

As I looked from Emma's countenance, I saw that Wilhelm stood near, and glared on us with angry eyes. I went up to him, and offered him my hand.

16 "Come, Wilhelm, you cannot be angry that I have taken my revenge—I am at least glad that it is one which involves no injury to you"—"Why do you look so savagely upon me?" I continued. "I have entirely forgiven your foolish freak of last night."

"I shall never forgive you," muttered Wilhelm between his teeth.

I was ordered to wear my wreath through the evening. Music now sounded in the hall, and couples stood up to dance. I gave my arm to Emma, and led her to the head of the Quadrille. Her momentary sadness had passed away, and as she began to tread her graceful measure, she turned upon me a look of love and delight so radiant, that it sent a strange thrill to the very core of my frozen heart, and again I asked of myself: "what is it to be a woman?"

As we stood together in an interval of repose, I could not avoid overhearing the conversation of two strangers who occupied a place behind me, and of whom one spoke with a strongly marked Southern accent.

"What a beautiful antique head is this of the young Laureate's," remarked one, "so delicately chiselled, so finely set, one might say an Antinoüs, a Mercury, almost an Apollo."

"None of these," replied the Italian. "His beauty is of a more vague and undecided character—it is a face and form of strange contradictions—the eye and brow command, while the mouth persuades."

"The motions and gestures too are peculiar."

"Do you not see a striking resemblance to the lovely hermaphrodite in the villa Borghese?"

I heard no more—a mist came before my eyes, and a deadly faintness over my heart. With a hurried apology, I resigned Emma to the eager Wilhelm, and staggered to the open air—some minutes passed before I could recover strength to regain my room.

## Chapter 4th

Once alone, in my own room, I could breathe more freely, but my whole being had received a shock, an impetus that hurried it to some deed, some