

THE ETERNAL MOMENT

I

'Do you see that mountain just behind Elizabeth's toque? A young man fell in love with me there so nicely twenty years ago. Bob your head a minute, would you, Elizabeth, kindly.'

'Yes'm,' said Elizabeth, falling forward on the box like an unstiffened doll. Colonel Leyland put on his pince-nez, and looked at the mountain where the young man had fallen in love.

'Was he a nice young man?' he asked, smiling, though he lowered his voice a little on account of the maid.

'I never knew. But it is a very gratifying incident to remember at my age. Thank you, Elizabeth.'

'May one ask who he was?'

'A porter,' answered Miss Raby in her usual tones. 'Not even a certificated guide. A male person who was hired to carry the luggage, which he dropped.'

'Well! well! What did you do?'

'What a young lady should. Screamed and thanked him not to insult me. Ran, which was quite unnecessary, fell, sprained my ankle, screamed again; and he had to carry me half a mile, so penitent that I thought he would fling

me over a precipice. In that state we reached a certain Mrs Harbottle, at sight of whom I burst into tears. But she was so much stupider than I was, that I recovered quickly.'

'Of course, you said it was all your own fault?'

'I trust I did,' she said more seriously. 'Mrs Harbottle, who, like most people, was always right, had warned me against him; we had had him for expeditions before.'

'Ah! I see.'

'I doubt whether you do. Hitherto he had known his place. But he was too cheap: he gave us more than our money's worth. That, as you know, is an ominous sign in a low-born person.'

'But how was this your fault?'

'I encouraged him: I greatly preferred him to Mrs Harbottle. He was handsome and what I call agreeable; and he wore beautiful clothes. We lagged behind, and he picked me flowers. I held out my hand for them—instead of which he seized it and delivered a love oration which he had prepared out of *I promessi Sposi*.'

'Ah! an Italian.'

They were crossing the frontier at that moment. On a little bridge amid fir trees were two poles, one painted red, white, and green, and the other black and yellow.

'He lived in Italia Irredenta,' said Miss Raby. 'But we were to fly to the Kingdom. I wonder what would have happened if we had.'

'Good Lord!' said Colonel Leyland, in sudden

disgust. On the box Elizabeth trembled.

'But it might have been a most successful match.'

She was in the habit of talking in this mildly unconventional way. Colonel Leyland, who made allowances for her brilliancy, managed to exclaim: 'Rather! yes, rather!'

She turned on him with: 'Do you think I'm laughing at him?'

He looked a little bewildered, smiled, and did not reply. Their carriage was now crawling round the base of the notorious mountain. The road was built over the debris which had fallen and which still fell from its sides; and it had scarred the pine woods with devastating rivers of white stone. But farther up, Miss Raby remembered, on its gentler eastern slope, it possessed tranquil hollows, and flower-clad rocks, and a most tremendous view. She had not been quite as facetious as her companion supposed. The incident, certainly, had been ludicrous. But she was somehow able to laugh at it without laughing much at the actors or the stage.

'I had rather he made me a fool than that I thought he was one,' she said, after a long pause.

'Here is the Custom House,' said Colonel Leyland, changing the subject.

They had come to the land of *Ach* and *Ja*. Miss Raby sighed; for she loved the Latins, as

everyone must who is not pressed for time. But Colonel Leyland, a military man, respected Teutonia.

'They still talk Italian for seven miles,' she said comforting herself like a child.

'German is the coming language,' answered Colonel Leyland. 'All the important books on any subject are written in it.'

'But all the books on any important subject are written in Italian. Elizabeth—tell me an important subject.'

'Human Nature, ma'am,' said the maid, half shy, half impertinent.

'Elizabeth is a novelist, like her mistress,' said Colonel Leyland. He turned away to look at the scenery, for he did not like being entangled in a mixed conversation. He noted that the farms were more prosperous, that begging had stopped, that the women were uglier and the men more rotund, that more nourishing food was being eaten outside the wayside inns.

'Colonel Leyland, shall we go to the *Grand Hôtel des Alpes*, to the *Hôtel de Londres*, to the *Pension Liebig*, to the *Pension Atherley-Simon*, to the *Pension Belle Vue*, to the *Pension Old-England*, or to the *Albergo Biscione*?'

'I suppose you would prefer the *Biscione*.'

'I really shouldn't mind the *Grand Hôtel des Alpes*. The *Biscione* people own both, I hear. They have become quite rich.'

'You should have a splendid reception—if

such people know what gratitude is.'

For Miss Raby's novel, *The Eternal Moment*, which had made her reputation, had also made the reputation of Vorta.

'Oh, I was properly thanked. Signor Cantù wrote to me about three years after I had published. The letter struck me as a little pathetic, though it was very prosperous: I don't like transfiguring people's lives. I wonder whether they live in their old house or in the new one.'

Colonel Leyland had come to Vorta to be with Miss Raby; but he was very willing that they should be in different hotels. She, indifferent to such subtleties, saw no reason why they should not stop under the same roof, just as she could not see why they should not travel in the same carriage. On the other hand, she hated anything smart. He had decided on the *Grand Hôtel des Alpes*, and she was drifting towards the *Biscione*, when the tiresome Elizabeth said: 'My friend's lady is staying at the *Alpes*.'

'Oh! if Elizabeth's friend is there that settles it: we'll all go.'

'Very well'm,' said Elizabeth, studiously avoiding even the appearance of gratitude. Colonel Leyland's face grew severe over the want of discipline.

'You spoil her,' he murmured, when they had all descended to walk up a hill.

'There speaks the military man.'

'Certainly I have had too much to do with Tommies to enter into what you call "human relations". A little sentimentality, and the whole army would go to pieces.'

'I know; but the whole world isn't an army. So why should I pretend I'm an officer. You remind me of my Anglo-Indian friends, who were so shocked when I would be pleasant to some natives. They proved, quite conclusively, that it would never do for them, and have never seen that the proof didn't apply. The unlucky people here are always trying to lead the lucky; and it must be stopped. You've been unlucky; all your life you've had to command men, and exact prompt obedience and other unprofitable virtues. I'm lucky: I needn't do the same—and I won't.'

'Don't then,' he said smiling. 'But take care that the world isn't an army after all. And take care, besides, that you aren't being unjust to the unlucky people: we're fairly kind to your beloved lower orders, for instance.'

'Of course,' she said dreamily, as if he had made her no concession. 'It's becoming usual. But they see through it. They, like ourselves, know that only one thing in the world is worth having.'

'Ah! yes,' he sighed. 'It's a commercial age.'

'No!' exclaimed Miss Raby, so irritably that Elizabeth looked back to see what was wrong. 'You are stupid. Kindness and money are both

quite easy to part with. The only thing worth giving away is yourself. Did you ever give yourself away?’

‘Frequently.’

‘I mean, did you ever, intentionally, make a fool of yourself before your inferiors?’

‘Intentionally, never.’ He saw at last what she was driving at. It was her pleasure to pretend that such self-exposure was the only possible basis of true intercourse, the only gate in the spiritual barrier that divided class from class. One of her books had dealt with the subject, and very agreeable reading it made. ‘What about you?’ he added playfully.

‘I’ve never done it properly. Hitherto I’ve never felt a really big fool; but when I do, I hope I shall show it plainly.’

‘May I be there!’

‘You might not like it,’ she replied. ‘I may feel it at any moment and in mixed company. Anything might set me off.’

‘Behold Vorta!’ cried the driver, cutting short the sprightly conversation. He and Elizabeth and the carriage had reached the top of the hill. The black woods ceased; and they emerged into a valley whose sides were emerald lawns, rippling and doubling and merging each into each, yet always with an upward trend, so that it was 2000 feet to where the rock burst out of the grass and made great mountains, whose pinnacles were delicate in the purity of evening.

The driver, who had the gift of repetition, said: ‘Vorta! Vorta!’

Far up the valley was a large white village, tossing on undulating meadows like a ship in the sea, and at its prow, breasting a sharp incline, stood a majestic tower of new grey stone. As they looked at the tower it became vocal and spoke magnificently to the mountains, who replied.

They were again informed that this was Vorta, and that that was the new campanile—like the campanile of Venice, only finer—and that the sound was the sound of the campanile’s new bell.

‘Thank you; exactly,’ said Colonel Leyland while Miss Raby rejoiced that the village had made such use of its prosperity. She had feared to return to the place she had once loved so well, lest she should find something new. It had never occurred to her that the new thing might be beautiful. The architect had indeed gone south for his inspiration, and the tower which stood among the mountains was akin to the tower which had once stood beside the lagoons. But the birthplace of the bell it was impossible to determine, for there is no nationality in sound.

They drove forward into the lovely scene, pleased and silent. Approving tourists took them for a well-matched couple. There was indeed nothing offensively literary in Miss Raby’s kind angular face; and Colonel Leyland’s

profession had made him neat rather than aggressive. They did very well for a cultured and refined husband and wife, who had spent their lives admiring the beautiful things with which the world is filled.

As they approached, other churches, hitherto unnoticed, replied—tiny churches, ugly churches, churches painted pink with towers like pumpkins, churches painted white with shingle spires, churches hidden altogether in the glades of a wood or the folds of a meadow—till the evening air was full of little voices, with the great voice singing in their midst. Only the English church, lately built in the Early English style, kept chaste silence.

The bells ceased, and all the little churches receded into darkness. Instead, there was a sound of dressing-gongs, and a vision of tired tourists hurrying back for dinner. A landau, with *Pension Atherley-Simon* upon it, was trotting to meet the diligence, which was just due. A lady was talking to her mother about an evening dress. Young men with rackets were talking to young men with alpenstocks. Then, across the darkness, a fiery finger wrote *Grand Hôtel des Alpes*.

‘Behold the electric light!’ said the driver, hearing his passengers exclaim.

Pension Belle Vue started out against a pinewood, and from the brink of the river the *Hôtel de Londres* replied. *Pensions Liebig* and

Lorelei were announced in green and amber respectively. The *Old-England* appeared in scarlet. The illuminations covered a large area, for the best hotels stood outside the village, in elevated or romantic situations. This display took place every evening in the season, but only while the diligence arrived. As soon as the last tourist was suited, the lights went out, and the hotel-keepers, cursing or rejoicing, retired to their cigars.

‘Horrible!’ said Miss Raby.

‘Horrible people!’ said Colonel Leyland.

The *Hôtel des Alpes* was an enormous building, which, being made of wood, suggested a distended chalet. But this impression was corrected by a costly and magnificent view terrace, the squared stones of which were visible for miles, and from which, as from some great reservoir, asphalt paths trickled over the adjacent country. Their carriage, having ascended a private drive, drew up under a vaulted portico of pitch-pine, which opened on to this terrace on one side, and into the covered lounge on the other. There was a whirl of officials—men with gold braid, smarter men with more gold braid, men smarter still with no gold braid. Elizabeth assumed an arrogant air, and carried a small straw basket with difficulty. Colonel Leyland became every inch a soldier. Miss Raby, whom, in spite of long experience, a large hotel always flustered, was hurried into an

expensive bedroom, and advised to dress herself immediately if she wished to partake of table d'hôte.

As she came up the staircase, she had seen the dining-room filling with English and Americans and with rich hungry Germans. She liked company, but tonight she was curiously depressed. She seemed to be confronted with an unpleasing vision, the outlines of which were still obscure.

'I will eat in my room,' she told Elizabeth. 'Go to your dinner: I'll do the unpacking.'

She wandered round, looking at the list of rules, the list of prices, the list of excursions, the red plush sofa, the jugs and basins on which was lithographed a view of the mountains. Where amid such splendour was there a place for Signor Cantù with his china-bowled pipe, and for Signora Cantù with her snuff-coloured shawl?

When the waiter at last brought up her dinner, she asked after her host and hostess.

He replied, in cosmopolitan English, that they were both well.

'Do they live here, or at the *Biscione*?'

'Here, why yes. Only poor tourists go to the *Biscione*.'

'Who lives there, then?'

'The mother of Signor Cantù. She is unconnected,' he continued, like one who has learnt a lesson, 'she is unconnected absolutely

with us. Fifteen years back, yes. But now, where is the *Biscione*? I beg you contradict if we are spoken about together.'

Miss Raby said quietly: 'I have made a mistake. Would you kindly give notice that I shall not want my room, and say that the luggage is to be taken, immediately, to the *Biscione*.'

'Certainly! certainly!' said the waiter, who was well trained. He added with a vicious snort, 'You will have to pay.'

'Undoubtedly,' said Miss Raby.

The elaborate machinery which had so recently sucked her in began to disgorge her. The trunks were carried down, the vehicle in which she had arrived was recalled. Elizabeth, white with indignation, appeared in the hall. She paid for beds in which they had not slept, and for food which they had never eaten. Amidst the whirl of gold-laced officials, who hoped even in that space of time to have established a claim to be tipped, she moved towards the door. The guests in the lounge observed her with amusement, concluding that she had found the hotel too dear.

'What is it? Whatever is it? Are you not comfortable?' Colonel Leyland in his evening dress ran after her.

'Not that; I've made a mistake. This hotel belongs to the son; I must go to the *Biscione*. He's quarrelled with the old people: I think the

father's dead.'

'But really—if you are comfortable here—'

'I must find out tonight whether it is true. And I must also'—her voice quivered—'find out whether it is my fault.'

'How in the name of goodness—'

'I shall bear it if it is,' she continued gently. 'I am too old to be a tragedy queen as well as an evil genius.'

What does she mean? Whatever does she mean?' he murmured, as he watched the carriage lights descending the hill. 'What harm has she done? What harm is there for that matter? Hotel-keepers always quarrel: it's no business of ours.' He ate a good dinner in silence. Then his thoughts were turned by the arrival of his letters from the post office.

Dearest Edwin,

It is with the greatest diffidence that I write to you, and I know you will believe me when I say that I do not write from curiosity. I only require an answer to one plain question. Are you engaged to Miss Raby or no? Fashions have altered even since my young days. But for all that an engagement is still an engagement, and should be announced at once, to save all parties discomfort. Though your health has broken down and you have abandoned your profession, you can still protect the family honour.

'Drivel!' exclaimed Colonel Leyland. Acquaintance with Miss Raby had made his sight keener. He recognized in this part of his sister's letter nothing but an automatic conventionality. He was no more moved by its perusal than she had been by its composition.

As for the maid whom the Bannons mentioned to me, she is not a chaperone—nothing but a sop to throw in the eyes of the world. I am not saying a word against Miss Raby, whose books we always read. Literary people are always unpractical, and we are confident that she does not know. Perhaps I do not think her the wife for you; but that is another matter.

My babes, who all send love (so does Lionel), are at present an unmitigated joy. One's only anxiety is for the future, when the crushing expenses of good education will have to be taken into account.

Your loving Nelly

How could he explain the peculiar charm of the relations between himself and Miss Raby? There had never been a word of marriage, and would probably never be a word of love. If, instead of seeing each other frequently, they should come to see each other always it would be as sage companions, familiar with life, not as

egoistic lovers, craving for infinities of passion which they had no right to demand and no power to supply. Neither professed to be a virgin soul, or to be ignorant of the other's limitations and inconsistencies. They scarcely even made allowances for each other. Toleration implies reserve; and the greatest safeguard of unruffled intercourse is knowledge. Colonel Leyland had courage of no mean order: he cared little for the opinion of people whom he understood. Nelly and Lionel and their babes were welcome to be shocked or displeased. Miss Raby was an authoress, a kind of Radical; he a soldier, a kind of aristocrat. But the time for their activities was passing; he was ceasing to fight, she to write. They could pleasantly spend together their autumn. Nor might they prove the worst companions for a winter.

He was too delicate to admit, even to himself, the desirability of marrying two thousand a year. But it lent an unacknowledged perfume to his thoughts. He tore Nelly's letter into little pieces, and dropped them into the darkness out of the bedroom window.

'Funny lady!' he murmured, as he looked towards Vorta, trying to detect the campanile in the growing light of the moon. 'Why have you gone to be uncomfortable? Why will you interfere in the quarrels of people who can't understand you, and whom you don't understand. How silly you are to think you've

caused them. You think you've written a book which has spoilt the place and made the inhabitants corrupt and sordid. I know just how you think. So you will make yourself unhappy, and go about trying to put right what never was right. Funny lady!'

Close below him he could now see the white fragments of his sister's letter. In the valley the campanile appeared, rising out of wisps of silvery vapour.

'Dear lady!' he whispered, making towards the village a little movement with his hands.

II

Miss Raby's first novel, *The Eternal Moment*, was written round the idea that man does not live by time alone, that an evening gone may become like a thousand ages in the courts of heaven—the idea that was afterwards expounded more philosophically by Maeterlinck. She herself now declared that it was a tiresome, affected book, and that the title suggested the dentist's chair. But she had written it when she was feeling young and happy; and that, rather than maturity, is the hour in which to formulate a creed. As years pass, the conception may become more solid, but the desire and the power to impart it to others are alike weakened. It did not altogether displease her that her earliest work had been her most ambitious.

By a strange fate, the book made a great sensation, especially in unimaginative circles. Idle people interpreted it to mean that there was no harm in wasting time, vulgar people that there was no harm in being fickle, pious people interpreted it as an attack upon morality. The authoress became well known in society, where her enthusiasm for the lower classes only lent her an additional charm. That very year Lady Anstey, Mrs Heriot, the Marquis of Bambergh, and many others, penetrated to Vorta, where the scene of the book was laid. They returned enthusiastic. Lady Anstey exhibited her watercolour drawings; Mrs Heriot, who photographed, wrote an article in *The Strand*; while *The Nineteenth Century* published a long description of the place by the Marquis of Bambergh, entitled 'The Modern Peasant, and his Relations with Roman Catholicism.'

Thanks to these efforts, Vorta became a rising place, and people who liked being off the beaten track went there, and pointed out the way to others. Miss Raby, by a series of trivial accidents, had never returned to the village whose rise was so intimately connected with her own. She had heard from time to time of its progress. It had also been whispered that an inferior class of tourist was finding it out, and, fearing to find something spoilt, she had at last a certain diffidence in returning to scenes which once had given her so much pleasure. Colonel

Leyland persuaded her; he wanted a cool healthy spot for the summer, where he could read and talk and find walks suitable for an athletic invalid. Their friends laughed; their acquaintances gossiped; their relatives were furious. But he was courageous and she was indifferent. They had accomplished the expedition under the scanty aegis of Elizabeth.

Her arrival was saddening. It displeased her to see the great hotels in a great circle, standing away from the village where all life should have centred. Their illuminated titles, branded on the tranquil evening slopes, still danced in her eyes. And the monstrous *Hôtel des Alpes* haunted her like a nightmare. In her dreams she recalled the portico, the ostentatious lounge, the polished walnut bureau, the vast rack for the bedroom keys, the panoramic bedroom crockery, the uniforms of the officials, and the smell of smart people—which is to some nostrils quite as depressing as the smell of poor ones. She was not enthusiastic over the progress of civilization, knowing by Eastern experiences that civilization rarely puts her best foot foremost, and is apt to make the barbarians immoral and vicious before her compensating qualities arrive. And here there was no question of progress: the world had more to learn from the village than the village from the world.

At the *Biscione*, indeed, she had found little change—only the pathos of a survival. The old

landlord had died, and the old landlady was ill in bed, but the antique spirit had not yet departed. On the timbered front was still painted the dragon swallowing the child—the arms of the Milanese Visconti, from whom the Cantùs might well be descended. For there was something about the little hotel which compelled a sympathetic guest to believe, for the time at all events, in aristocracy. The great manner, only to be obtained without effort, ruled throughout. In each bedroom were three or four beautiful things—a little piece of silk tapestry, a fragment of rococo carving, some blue tiles, framed and hung upon the whitewashed wall. There were pictures in the sitting-rooms and on the stairs—eighteenth-century pictures in the style of Carlo Dolce and the Caracci—a blue-robed Mater Dolorosa, a fluttering saint, a magnanimous Alexander with a receding chin. A debased style—so the superior person and the textbooks say. Yet, at times, it may have more freshness and significance than a newly-purchased Fra Angelico. Miss Raby, who had visited dukes in their residences without a perceptible tremor, felt herself blatant and modern when she entered the *Albergo Biscione*. The most trivial things—the sofa cushions, the table cloths, the cases for the pillows—though they might be made of poor materials and be aesthetically incorrect, inspired her with reverence and

humility. Through this cleanly, gracious dwelling there had once moved Signor Cantù with his china-bowled pipe, Signora Cantù in her snuff-coloured shawl, and Bartolommeo Cantù, now proprietor of the *Grand Hôtel des Alpes*.

She sat down to breakfast next morning in a mood which she tried to attribute to her bad night and her increasing age. Never, she thought, had she seen people more unattractive and more unworthy than her fellow-guests. A black-browed woman was holding forth on patriotism and the duty of English tourists to present an undivided front to foreign nations. Another woman kept up a feeble lament, like a dribbling tap which never gathers flow yet never quite ceases, complaining of the food, the charges, the noise, the clouds, the dust. She liked coming here herself, she said; but she hardly liked to recommend it to her friends: it was the kind of hotel one felt like that about. Males were rare, and in great demand; a young one was describing, amid fits of laughter, the steps he had taken to astonish the natives.

Miss Raby was sitting opposite the famous fresco, which formed the only decoration of the room. It had been discovered during some repairs; and, though the surface had been injured in places, the colours were still bright. Signora Cantù attributed it now to Titian, now to Giotto, and declared that no one could

interpret its meaning; professors and artists had puzzled themselves in vain. This she said because it pleased her to say it; the meaning was perfectly clear, and had been frequently explained to her. Those four figures were sibyls, holding prophecies of the Nativity. It was uncertain for what original reason they had been painted high up in the mountains, at the extreme boundary of Italian art. Now, at all events, they were an invaluable source of conversation; and many an acquaintance had been opened, and argument averted, by their timely presence on the wall.

'Aren't those saints cunning!' said an American lady, following Miss Raby's glance.

The lady's father muttered something about superstition. They were a lugubrious couple, lately returned from the Holy Land, where they had been cheated shamefully, and their attitude towards religion had suffered in consequence.

Miss Raby said, rather sharply, that the saints were sibyls.

'But I don't recall sibyls,' said the lady, 'either in the N.T. or the O.'

'Inventions of the priests to deceive the peasantry,' said the father sadly. 'Same as their churches; tinsel pretending to be gold, cotton pretending to be silk, stucco pretending to be marble; same as their processions, same as their—(he swore)—campaniles.'

'My father,' said the lady, bending forward,

'he does suffer so from insomnia. Fancy a bell every morning at six!'

'Yes, ma'am; you profit. We've stopped it.'

'Stopped the early bell ringing?' cried Miss Raby.

People looked up to see who she was. Some one whispered that she wrote.

He replied that he had come up all these feet for rest, and that if he did not get it he would move on to another centre. The English and American visitors had co-operated, and forced the hotel-keepers to take action. Now the priests rang a dinner bell, which was endurable. He believed that 'co-operation' would do anything: it had been the same with the peasants.

'How did the tourists interfere with the peasants?' asked Miss Raby, getting very hot, and trembling all over.

'We said the same; we had come for rest, and we would have it. Every week they got drunk and sang till two. Is that a proper way to go on, anyhow?'

'I remember,' said Miss Raby, 'that some of them did get drunk. But I also remember how they sang.'

'Quite so. Till two,' he retorted.

They parted in mutual irritation. She left him holding forth on the necessity of a new universal religion of the open air. Over his head stood the four sibyls, gracious for all their clumsiness and crudity, each proferring a tablet inscribed with

concise promise of redemption. If the old religions had indeed become insufficient for humanity, it did not seem probable that an adequate substitute would be produced in America.

It was too early to pay her promised visit to Signora Cantù. Nor was Elizabeth, who had been rude overnight and was now tiresomely penitent, a possible companion. There were a few tables outside the inn, at which some women sat, drinking beer. Pollarded chestnuts shaded them; and a low wooden balustrade fenced them off from the village street. On this balustrade Miss Raby perched, for it gave her a view of the campanile. A critical eye could discover plenty of faults in its architecture. But she looked at it all with increasing pleasure, in which was mingled a certain gratitude.

The German waitress came out and suggested very civilly that she should find a more comfortable seat. This was the place where the lower classes ate; would she not go to the drawing-room?

'Thank you, no, for how many years have you classified your guests according to their birth?'

'For many years. It was necessary,' replied the admirable woman. She returned to the house full of meat and common sense, one of the many signs that the Teuton was gaining on the Latin in this debatable valley.

A grey-haired lady came out next, shading her

eyes from the sun, and crackling *The Morning Post*. She glanced at Miss Raby pleasantly, blew her nose, apologized for speaking, and spoke as follows:

'This evening, I wonder if you know, there is a concert in aid of the stained-glass window for the English Church. Might I persuade you to take tickets? As has been said, it is so important that English people should have a rallying point, is it not?'

'Most important,' said Miss Raby; 'but I wish the rallying point could be in England.'

The grey-haired lady smiled. Then she looked puzzled. Then she realized that she had been insulted, and, crackling *The Morning Post*, departed.

'I have been rude,' thought Miss Raby dejectedly. 'Rude to a lady as silly and as grey-haired as myself. This is not a day on which I ought to talk to people.'

Her life had been successful, and on the whole happy. She was unaccustomed to that mood, which is termed depressed, but which certainly gives visions of wider, if greyer, horizons. That morning her outlook altered. She walked through the village, scarcely noticing the mountains by which it was still surrounded, or the unaltered radiance of its sun. But she was fully conscious of something new; of the indefinable corruption which is produced by the passage of a large number of people.

Even at that time the air was heavy with meat and drink, to which was added dust and tobacco smoke and the smell of tired horses. Carriages were huddled against the church, and underneath the campanile a woman was guarding a stack of bicycles. The season had been bad for climbing; and groups of young men in smart Norfolk suits were idling up and down, waiting to be hired as guides. Two large inexpensive hotels stood opposite the post office; and in front of them innumerable little tables surged out into the street. Here, from an early hour in the morning, eating had gone on, and would continue till a late hour at night. The customers, chiefly German, refreshed themselves with cries and with laughter, passing their arms round the waists of their wives. Then, rising heavily, they departed in single file towards some viewpoint, whereon a red flag indicated the possibility of another meal. The whole population was employed, even down to the little girls, who worried the guests to buy picture postcards and edelweiss. Vorta had taken to the tourist trade.

A village must have some trade; and this village had always been full of virility and power. Obscure and happy, its splendid energies had found employment in wresting a livelihood out of the earth, whence had come a certain dignity, and kindness, and love for other men. Civilization did not relax these

energies, but it had diverted them; and all the precious qualities, which might have helped to heal the world, had been destroyed. The family affection, the affection for the commune, the sane pastoral virtues—all had perished while the campanile which was to embody them was being built. No villain had done this thing: it was the work of ladies and gentlemen who were good and rich and often clever—who, if they thought about the matter at all, thought that they were conferring a benefit, moral as well as commercial, on any place in which they chose to stop.

Never before had Miss Raby been conscious of such universal misdoing. She returned to the *Biscione* shattered and exhausted, remembering that terrible text in which there is much semblance of justice: 'But woe to him through whom the offence cometh.'

Signora Cantù, somewhat over-excited, was lying in a dark room on the ground floor. The walls were bare; for all the beautiful things were in the rooms of her guests whom she loved as a good queen might love her subjects—and the walls were dirty also, for this was Signora Cantù's own room. But no palace had so fair a ceiling; for from the wooden beams were suspended a whole dowry of copper vessels—pails, cauldrons, water pots, of every colour from lustrous black to the palest pink. It pleased the old lady to look up at these tokens of

prosperity. An American lady had lately departed without them, more puzzled than angry.

The two women had little in common; for Signora Cantù was an inflexible aristocrat. Had she been a great lady of the great century, she would have gone speedily to the guillotine, and Miss Raby would have howled approval. Now, with her scanty hair in curl-papers, and the snuff-coloured shawl spread over her, she entertained the distinguished authoress with accounts of other distinguished people who had stopped, and might again stop, at the *Biscione*. At first her tone was dignified. But before long she proceeded to village news, and a certain bitterness began to show itself. She chronicled deaths with a kind of melancholy pride. Being old herself, she liked to meditate on the fairness of Fate, which had not spared her contemporaries, and often had not spared her juniors. Miss Raby was unaccustomed to extract such consolation. She too was growing old, but it would have pleased her better if others could have remained young. She remembered few of these people well, but deaths were symbolical, just as the death of a flower may symbolize the passing of all the spring.

Signora Cantù then went on to her own misfortunes, beginning with an account of a landslip, which had destroyed her little farm. A landslip, in that valley, never hurried. Under

the green coat of turf water would collect, just as an abscess is formed under the skin. There would be a lump on the sloping meadow, then the lump would break and discharge a slowly-moving stream of mud and stones. Then the whole area seemed to be corrupted; on every side the grass cracked and doubled into fantastic creases, the trees grew awry, the barns and cottages collapsed, all the beauty turned gradually to indistinguishable pulp, which slid downwards till it was washed away by some stream.

From the farm they proceeded to other grievances, over which Miss Raby became almost too depressed to sympathize. It was a bad season; the guests did not understand the ways of the hotel; the servants did not understand the guests; she was told she ought to have a concierge. But what was the good of a concierge?

'I have no idea,' said Miss Raby, feeling that no concierge would ever restore the fortunes of the *Biscione*.

'They say he would meet the diligence and entrap the new arrivals. What pleasure should I have from guests I entrapped?'

'The other hotels do it,' said Miss Raby, sadly.

'Exactly. Every day a man comes down from the *Alpes*.'

There was an awkward silence. Hitherto they

had avoided mentioning that name.

'He takes them all,' she continued, in a burst of passion. 'My son takes all my guests. He has taken all the English nobility, and the best Americans, and all my old Milanese friends. He slanders me up and down the valley, saying that the drains are bad. The hotel-keepers will not recommend me; they send on their guests to him, because he pays them five per cent for every one they send. He pays the drivers, he pays the porters, he pays the guides. He pays the band, so that it hardly ever plays down in the village. He even pays the little children to say my drains are bad. He and his wife and his concierge, they mean to ruin me, they would like to see me die.'

'Don't—don't say these things, Signora Cantù.' Miss Raby began to walk about the room, speaking, as was her habit, what was true rather than what was intelligible. 'Try not to be so angry with your son. You don't know what he had to contend with. You don't know who led him into it. Some one else may be to blame. And whoever it may be—you will remember them in your prayers.'

'Of course I am a Christian!' exclaimed the angry old lady. 'But he will not ruin me. I seem poor, but he has borrowed—too much. That hotel will fail!'

'And perhaps,' continued Miss Raby, 'there is not much wickedness in the world. Most of the

evil we see is the result of little faults—of stupidity or vanity.'

'And I even know who led him into it—his wife, and the man who is now his concierge.'

'This habit of talking, of self-expression—it seems so pleasant and necessary—yet it does harm—'

They were both interrupted by an uproar in the street. Miss Raby opened the window; and a cloud of dust, heavy with petrol, entered. A passing motor car had twitched over a table. Much beer had been spilt, and a little blood.

Signora Cantù sighed peevishly at the noise. Her ill-temper had exhausted her, and she lay motionless, with closed eyes. Over her head two copper vases clinked gently in the sudden gust of wind. Miss Raby had been on the point of a great dramatic confession, of a touching appeal for forgiveness. Her words were ready; her words always were ready. But she looked at those closed eyes, that suffering enfeebled frame, and she knew that she had no right to claim the luxury of pardon.

It seemed to her that with this interview her life had ended. She had done all that was possible. She had done much evil. It only remained for her to fold her hands and to wait, till her ugliness and her incompetence went the way of beauty and strength. Before her eyes there arose the pleasant face of Colonel Leyland, with whom she might harmlessly conclude her

days. He would not be stimulating, but it did not seem desirable that she should be stimulated. It would be better if her faculties did close, if the senseless activity of her brain and her tongue were gradually numbed. For the first time in her life, she was tempted to become old.

Signora Cantù was still speaking of her son's wife and concierge; of the vulgarity of the former and the ingratitude of the latter, whom she had been kind to long ago, when he first wandered up from Italy, an obscure boy. Now he had sided against her. Such was the reward of charity.

'And what is his name?' asked Miss Raby absently.

'Feo Ginori,' she replied. 'You would not remember him. He used to carry—'

From the new campanile there burst a flood of sound to which the copper vessels vibrated responsively. Miss Raby lifted her hands, not to her ears but to her eyes. In her enfeebled state, the throbbing note of the bell had the curious effect of blood returning into frozen veins.

'I remember that man perfectly,' she said at last; 'and I shall see him this afternoon.'

III

Miss Raby and Elizabeth were seated together in the lounge of the *Hôtel des Alpes*. They had walked up from the *Biscione* to see Colonel Leyland. But he, apparently, had walked down

there to see them, and the only thing to do was to wait, and to justify the wait by ordering some refreshment. So Miss Raby had afternoon tea, while Elizabeth behaved like a perfect lady over an ice, occasionally turning the spoon upside down in the mouth when she saw that no one was looking. The underwaiters were clearing cups and glasses off the marble-topped tables, and the gold-laced officials were rearranging the wicker chairs into seductive groups of three and two. Here and there the visitors lingered among their crumbs, and the Russian Prince had fallen asleep in a prominent and ungraceful position. But most people had started for a little walk before dinner, or had gone to play tennis, or had taken a book under a tree. The weather was delightful, and the sun had so far declined that its light had become spiritualized, suggesting new substance as well as new colour in everything on which it fell. From her seat Miss Raby could see the great precipices under which they had passed the day before; and beyond those precipices she could see Italy—the Val d'Aprile, the Val Senese and the mountains she had named 'The Beasts of the South'. All day those mountains were insignificant—distant chips of white or grey stone. But the evening sun transfigured them, and they would sit up like purple bears against the southern sky.

'It is a sin you should not be out, Elizabeth. Find your friend if you can, and make her go

with you. If you see Colonel Leyland, tell him I am here.'

'Is that all, ma'am?' Elizabeth was fond of her eccentric mistress, and her heart had been softened by the ice. She saw that Miss Raby did not look well. Possibly the course of love was running roughly. And indeed gentlemen must be treated with tact, especially when both parties are getting on.

'Don't give pennies to the children: that is the only other thing.'

The guests had disappeared, and the number of officials visibly diminished. From the hall behind came the genteel sniggers of those two most vile creatures, a young lady behind the bureau and young man in a frock coat who shows new arrivals to their rooms. Some of the porters joined them, standing at a suitable distance. At last only Miss Raby, the Russian Prince, and the concierge were left in the lounge.

The concierge was a competent European of forty or so, who spoke all languages fluently, and some well. He was still active, and had evidently once been muscular. But either his life or his time of life had been unkind to his figure: in a few years he would certainly be fat. His face was less easy to decipher. He was engaged in the unquestioning performance of his duty, and that is not a moment for self-revelation. He opened the windows, he filled the matchboxes, he

flicked the little tables with a duster, always keeping an eye on the door in case any one arrived without luggage, or left without paying. He touched an electric bell, and a waiter flew up and cleared away Miss Raby's tea-things. He touched another bell, and sent an underling to tidy up some fragments of paper which had fallen out of a bedroom window. Then 'Excuse me, madam!' and he had picked up Miss Raby's handkerchief with a slight bow. He seemed to bear her no grudge for her abrupt departure of the preceding evening. Perhaps it was into his hand that she had dropped a tip. Perhaps he did not remember she had been there.

The gesture with which he returned the handkerchief troubled her with vague memories. Before she could thank him he was back in the doorway, standing sideways, so that the slight curve of his stomach was outlined against the view. He was speaking to a youth of athletic but melancholy appearance, who was fidgeting in the portico without. 'I told you the percentage,' she heard. 'If you had agreed to it, I would have recommended you. Now it is too late. I have enough guides.'

Our generosity benefits more people than we suppose. We tip the cabman, and something goes to the man who whistled for him. We tip the man who lights up the stalactite grotto with magnesium wire, and something goes to the boatman who brought us there. We tip the

waiter in the restaurant, and something goes off the waiter's wages. A vast machinery, whose existence we seldom realize, promotes the distribution of our wealth. When the concierge returned, Miss Raby asked: 'And what is the percentage?'

She asked with the definite intention of disconcerting him, not because she was unkind, but because she wished to discover what qualities, if any, lurked beneath that civil, efficient exterior. And the spirit of her inquiry was sentimental rather than scientific.

With an educated man she would have succeeded. In attempting to reply to her question, he would have revealed something. But the concierge had no reason to pay even lip service to logic. He replied: 'Yes madam! this is perfect weather, both for our visitors and for the hay,' and hurried to help a bishop, who was selecting a picture postcard.

Miss Raby, instead of moralizing on the inferior resources of the lower classes, acknowledged a defeat. She watched the man spreading out the postcards, helpful yet not obtrusive, alert yet deferential. She watched him make the bishop buy more than he wanted. This was the man who had talked of love to her upon the mountain. But hitherto he had only revealed his identity by chance gestures bequeathed to him at birth. Intercourse with the gentle classes had required new qualities—

civility, omniscience, imperturbability. It was the old answer: the gentle classes were responsible for him. It is inevitable, as well as desirable, that we should bear each other's burdens.

It was absurd to blame Feo for his worldliness—for his essential vulgarity. He had not made himself. It was even absurd to regret his transformation from an athlete: his greasy stoutness, his big black kiss-curl, his waxed moustache, his chin which was dividing and propagating itself like some primitive form of life. In England, nearly twenty years before, she had altered his figure as well as his character. He was one of the products of *The Eternal Moment*.

A great tenderness overcame her—the sadness of an unskilful demiurge, who makes a world and beholds that is bad. She desired to ask pardon of her creatures, even though they were too poorly formed to grant it. The longing to confess, which she had suppressed that morning beside the bed of Signora Cantù, broke out again with the violence of a physical desire. When the bishop had gone she renewed the conversation, though on different lines, saying: 'Yes it is beautiful weather. I have just been enjoying a walk up from the *Biscione*. I am stopping there!'

He saw that she was willing to talk, and replied pleasantly: 'The *Biscione* must be a very nice hotel: many people speak well of it. The

fresco is very beautiful.' He was too shrewd to object to a little charity.

'What lots of new hotels there are!' She lowered her voice in order not to rouse the Prince, whose presence weighed on her curiously.

'Oh, madam! I should indeed think so. When I was a lad—excuse me one moment.'

An American girl, who was new to the country, came up with her hand full of coins, and asked him hopelessly 'whatever they were worth'. He explained, and gave her change: Miss Raby was not sure that he gave her right change.

'When I was a lad—' He was again interrupted, to speed two parting guests. One of them tipped him; he said 'Thank you.' The other did not tip him; he said 'Thank you,' all the same but not in the same way. Obviously he had as yet no recollections of Miss Raby.

'When I was a lad, Vorta was a poor little place.'

'But a pleasant place?'

'Very pleasant, madam.'

'Kouf!' said the Russian Prince, suddenly waking up and startling them both. He clapped on a felt hat, and departed at full speed for a constitutional. Miss Raby and Feo were left together.

It was then that she ceased to hesitate, and determined to remind him that they had met

before. All day she had sought for a spark of life, and it might be summoned by pointing to that other fire which she discerned, far back in the travelled distance, high up in the mountains of youth. What he would do, if he also discerned it, she did not know; but she hoped that he would become alive, that he at all events would escape the general doom which she had prepared for the place and the people. And what she would do, during their joint contemplation, she did not even consider.

She would hardly have ventured if the sufferings of the day had not hardened her. After much pain, respectability becomes ludicrous. And she had only to overcome the difficulty of Feo's being a man, not the difficulty of his being a concierge. She had never observed that spiritual reticence towards social inferiors which is usual at the present day.

'This is my second visit,' she said boldly. 'I stayed at the *Biscione* twenty years ago.'

He showed the first sign of emotion: *that* reference to the *Biscione* annoyed him.

'I was told I should find you up here,' continued Miss Raby. 'I remember you very well. You used to take us over the passes.'

She watched his face intently. She did not expect it to relax into an expansive smile. 'Ah!' he said, taking off his peaked cap, 'I remember you perfectly, madam. What a pleasure, if I may say so, to meet you again!'

'I am pleased, too,' said the lady, looking at him doubtfully.

'You and another lady, madam, was it not? Miss—'

'Mrs Harbottle.'

'To be sure; I carried your luggage. I often remember your kindness.'

She looked up. He was standing near an open window, and the whole of fairyland stretched behind him. Her sanity forsook her, and she said gently: 'Will you misunderstand me, if I say that I have never forgotten your kindness either?'

He replied: 'The kindness was yours, madam; I only did my duty.'

'Duty?' she cried; 'what about duty?'

'You and Miss Harbottle were such generous ladies. I well remember how grateful I was: you always paid me above the tariff fare—'

Then she realized that he had forgotten everything; forgotten her, forgotten what had happened, even forgotten what he was like when he was young.

'Stop being polite,' she said coldly. 'You were not polite when I saw you last.'

'I am very sorry,' he exclaimed, suddenly alarmed.

'Turn round. Look at the mountains.'

'Yes, yes.' His fishy eyes blinked nervously. He fiddled with his watch chain which lay in a furrow of his waistcoat. He ran away to warn

some poorly dressed children off the view-terrace. When he returned she still insisted.

'I must tell you,' she said, in calm, business-like tones. 'Look at that great mountain, round which the road goes south. Look half-way up, on its eastern side—where the flowers are. It was there that you once gave yourself away.'

He gaped at her in horror. He remembered. He was inexpressibly shocked.

It was at that moment that Colonel Leyland returned.

She walked up to him, saying, 'This is the man I spoke of yesterday.'

'Good afternoon; what man?' said Colonel Leyland fussily. He saw that she was flushed, and concluded that some one had been rude to her. Since their relations were somewhat anomalous, he was all the more particular that she should be treated with respect.

'The man who fell in love with me when I was young.'

'It is untrue!' cried the wretched Feo, seeing at once the trap that had been laid for him. 'The lady imagined it. I swear, sir—I meant nothing. I was a lad. It was before I learnt behaviour. I had even forgotten it. She reminded me. She has disturbed me.'

'Good Lord!' said Colonel Leyland. 'Good Lord!'

'I shall lose my place, sir; and I have a wife and children. I shall be ruined.'

'Sufficient!' cried Colonel Leyland. 'Whatever Miss Raby's intentions may be, she does not intend to ruin you.'

'You have misunderstood me, Feo,' said Miss Raby gently.

'How unlucky we have been missing each other,' said Colonel Leyland, in trembling tones that were meant to be nonchalant. 'Shall we go a little walk before dinner? I hope that you are stopping.'

She did not attend. She was watching Feo. His alarm had subsided; and he revealed a new emotion, even less agreeable to her. His shoulders straightened, he developed an irresistible smile, and, when he saw that she was looking and that Colonel Leyland was not, he winked at her.

It was a ghastly sight, perhaps the most hopelessly depressing of all the things she had seen at Vorta. But its effect on her was memorable. It evoked a complete vision of that same man as he had been twenty years before. She could see him to the smallest detail of his clothes or his hair, the flowers in his hand, the graze on his wrist, the heavy bundle that he had loosed from his back, so that he might speak as a free-man. She could hear his voice, neither insolent nor diffident, never threatening, never apologizing, urging her first in the studied phrases he had learnt from books, then, as his passion grew, becoming incoherent, crying that

she must believe him, that she must love him in return, that she must fly with him to Italy, where they would live for ever, always happy, always young. She had cried out then, as a young lady should, and had thanked him not to insult her. And now, in her middle age, she cried out again, because the sudden shock and the contrast had worked a revelation. 'Don't think I'm in love with you now!' she cried.

For she realized that only now was she not in love with him: that the incident upon the mountain had been one of the great moments of her life—perhaps the greatest, certainly the most enduring: that she had drawn unacknowledged power and inspiration from it, just as trees draw vigour from a subterranean spring. Never again could she think of it as a half-humorous episode in her development. There was more reality in it than in all the years of success and varied achievement which had followed, and which it had rendered possible. For all her correct behaviour and lady-like display, she had been in love with Feo, and she had never loved so greatly again. A presumptuous boy had taken her to the gates of heaven; and, though she would not enter with him, the eternal remembrance of the vision had made life seem endurable and good.

Colonel Leyland, by her side, babbled respectabilities, trying to pass the situation off as normal. He was saving her, for he liked her

very much, and it pained him when she was foolish. But her last remark to Feo had frightened him; and he began to feel that he must save himself. They were no longer alone. The bureau lady and the young gentleman were listening breathlessly, and the porters were tittering at the discomfiture of their superior. A French lady had spread amongst the guests the agreeable news that an Englishman had surprised his wife making love to the concierge. On the terrace outside, a mother waved away her daughters. The bishop was preparing, very leisurely, for a walk.

But Miss Raby was oblivious. 'How little I know!' she said. 'I never knew till now that I had loved him and that it was a mere chance—a little catch, a kink—that I never told him so.'

It was her habit to speak out; and there was no present passion to disturb or prevent her. She was still detached, looking back at a fire upon the mountains, marvelling at its increased radiance, but too far off to feel its heat. And by speaking out she believed, pathetically enough, that she was making herself intelligible. Her remark seemed inexpressibly coarse to Colonel Leyland.

'But these beautiful thoughts are a poor business, are they not?' she continued, addressing Feo, who was losing his gallant air, and becoming bewildered. 'They're hardly enough to grow old on. I think I would give all

my imagination, all my skill with words, if I could recapture one crude fact, if I could replace one single person whom I have broken.'

'Quite so, madam,' he responded, with downcast eyes.

'If only I could find some one here who would understand me, to whom I could confess, I think I should be happier. I have done so much harm in Vorta, dear Feo—'

Feo raised his eyes. Colonel Leyland struck his stick on the parquetry floor.

'—and at last I thought I would speak to you, in case you understood me. I remembered that you had once been very gracious to me—yes, gracious: there is no other word. But I have harmed you also: how could you understand?'

'Madam, I understand perfectly,' said the concierge, who had recovered a little, and was determined to end the distressing scene, in which his reputation was endangered, and his vanity aroused only to be rebuffed. 'It is you who are mistaken. You have done me no harm at all. You have benefited me.'

'Precisely,' said Colonel Leyland. 'That is the conclusion of the whole matter. Miss Raby has been the making of Vorta.'

'Exactly, sir. After the lady's book, foreigners come, hotels are built, we all grow richer. When I first came here, I was a common ignorant porter who carried luggage over the passes; I worked, I found opportunities, I was pleasing to

the visitors—and now!’ He checked himself suddenly. ‘Of course I am still but a poor man. My wife and children—’

‘Children!’ cried Miss Raby, suddenly seeing a path of salvation. ‘What children have you?’

‘Three dear little boys,’ he replied, without enthusiasm.

‘How old is the youngest?’

‘Madam, five.’

‘Let me have that child,’ she said impressively, ‘and I will bring him up. He shall live among rich people. He shall see that they are not the vile creatures he supposes, always clamouring for respect and deference and trying to buy them with money. Rich people are good: they are capable of sympathy and love: they are fond of the truth; and when they are with each other they are clever. Your boy shall learn this, and he shall try to teach it to you. And when he grows up, if God is good to him he shall teach the rich: he shall teach them not to be stupid to the poor. I have tried myself, and people buy my books and say that they are good, and smile and lay them down. But I know this: so long as the stupidity exists, not only our charities and missions and schools, but the whole of our civilization, are vain.’

It was painful for Colonel Leyland to listen to such phrases. He made one more effort to rescue Miss Raby. ‘Je vous prie de ne pas—’ he began gruffly, and then stopped, for he remembered

that the concierge must know French. But Feo was not attending, nor, of course, had he attended to the lady’s prophecies. He was wondering if he could persuade his wife to give up the little boy, and, if he did, how much they dare ask from Miss Raby without repulsing her.

‘That will be my pardon,’ she continued, ‘if out of the place where I have done so much evil I bring some good. I am tired of memories, though they have been very beautiful. Now, Feo, I want you to give me something else: a living boy. I shall always puzzle you; and I cannot help it. I have changed so much since we met, and I have changed you also. We are both new people. Remember that; for I want to ask you one question before we part, and I cannot see why you shouldn’t answer it. Feo! I want you to attend.’

‘I beg your pardon, madam,’ said the concierge, rousing himself from his calculations. ‘Is there anything I can do for you?’

‘Answer “yes” or “no”; that day when you said you were in love with me—was it true?’

It was doubtful whether he could have answered, whether he had now any opinion about that day at all. But he did not make the attempt. He saw again that he was menaced by an ugly, withered, elderly woman, who was trying to destroy his reputation and his domestic peace. He shrank towards Colonel Leyland, and faltered: ‘Madam, you must excuse me, but I

had rather you did not see my wife; she is so sharp. You are most kind about my little boy; but, madam, no, she would never permit it.'

'You have insulted a lady!' shouted the colonel, and made a chivalrous movement of attack. From the hall behind came exclamations of horror and expectancy. Some one ran for the manager.

Miss Raby interposed, saying, 'He will never think me respectable.' She looked at the dishevelled Feo, fat, perspiring, and unattractive, and smiled sadly at her own stupidity, not at his. It was useless to speak to him again; her talk had scared away his competence and his civility, and scarcely anything was left. He was hardly more human than a frightened rabbit. 'Poor man,' she murmured, 'I have only vexed him. But I wish he would have given me the boy. And I wish he would have answered my question, if only out of pity. He does not know the sort of thing that keeps me alive.' She was looking at Colonel Leyland, and so discovered that he too was discomposed. It was her peculiarity that she could only attend to the person she was speaking with, and forgot the personality of the listeners. 'I have been vexing you as well: I am very silly.'

'It is a little late to think about me,' said Colonel Leyland grimly.

She remembered their conversation of yesterday, and understood him at once. But for

him she had no careful explanation, no tender pity. Here was a man who was well born and well educated, who had all those things called advantages, who imagined himself full of insight and cultivation and knowledge of mankind. And he had proved himself to be at the exact spiritual level of the man who had no advantages, who was poor and had been made vulgar, whose early virtue had been destroyed by circumstance, whose manliness and simplicity had perished in serving the rich. If Colonel Leyland also believed that she was now in love with Feo, she would not exert herself to undeceive him. Nor indeed would she have found it possible.

From the darkening valley there rose up the first strong singing note of the campanile, and she turned from the men towards it with a motion of love. But that day was not to close without the frustration of every hope. The sound inspired Feo to make conversation and, as the mountains reverberated, he said: 'Is it not unfortunate, sir? A gentleman went to see our fine new tower this morning and he believes that the land is slipping from underneath, and that it will fall. Of course it will not harm us up here.'

His speech was successful. The stormy scene came to an abrupt and placid conclusion. Before they had realized it, she had taken up her *Baedeker* and left them, with no tragic gesture. In that moment of final failure, there had been

vouchsafed to her a vision of herself, and she saw that she had lived worthily. She was conscious of a triumph over experience and earthly facts, a triumph magnificent, cold, hardly human, whose existence no one but herself would ever surmise. From the view-terrace she looked down on the perishing and perishable beauty of the valley, and, though she loved it no less, it seemed to be infinitely distant, like a valley in a star. At that moment, if kind voices had called her from the hotel, she would not have returned. 'I suppose this is old age,' she thought. 'It's not so very dreadful.'

No one did call her. Colonel Leyland would have liked to do so; for he knew she must be unhappy. But she had hurt him too much; she had exposed her thoughts and desires to a man of another class. Not only she, but he himself and all their equals, were degraded by it. She had discovered their nakedness to the alien.

People came in to dress for dinner and for the concert. From the hall there pressed out a stream of excited servants, filling the lounge as an operatic chorus fills the stage, and announcing the approach of the manager. It was impossible to pretend that nothing had happened. The scandal would be immense, and must be diminished as it best might.

Much as Colonel Leyland disliked touching people he took Feo by the arm, and then quickly raised his finger to his forehead.

'Exactly, sir,' whispered the concierge. 'Of course we understand—Oh, thank you, sir, thank you very much: thank you very much indeed!'