

**The Blossom and the Fruit. A True Story
of a Black Magician
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"The Idyll of The White Lotus,"

"Through The Gates of Gold,"

The Light On Path

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The Blossom and the Fruit

Part I - Part II - Part III

[Only the last seven chapters are included in this document. They were first published in Lucifer in June, July and August of 1888. The last six chapters were, it is said, written by HP Blavatsky, founder and co-editor with MC of Lucifer, as Collins had "lost control of the story".]

Chapter XXIX

Some parts of the north-east coast of England are singularly desolate and wild, and strangely deserted, considering how small the island is. One would suppose it hardly possible to find retreat in an over-populated small country such as the British islands. But nineteenth-century life is centred in cities, and in the present day people find no landmarks in Nature, and do not understand that by the edge of the sea, or in the midst of fields, they may be surrounded by aerial hosts who have been associated with that special spot since the wild small island was built amid its harassing seas. It has been a centre and point of a special character, for those who read between the lines during all this age of the earth of which we have any knowledge.

But there are some who know and feel the powers that are not visible to the material eyes, and who know how to use them.

In a remote, desolate, and very bleak part of the north-eastern coast there stands a small house, well sheltered by a high hill close behind it and a thick belt of trees. The land on which the house stands is part of a very large estate, which had been cut up and sold by successive spendthrift and dissolute owners. These men had Norman blood in them, and never took complete root upon English soil. The big castle which was their family house was most often untenanted, and so was this small Dower House on the seashore.

It was now the property of a younger son, who had scarcely ever been seen by the people of the place; never at all since he had been quite a boy. Now and again someone visited the old house for a few days; lights were seen in the windows so unexpectedly that the peasants said the house was haunted. But at present it was in regular occupation. A foreign servant came into the village one day to make purchases, and said that he was with a friend of Mr. Veryan, to whom the house belonged, who had borrowed it to live in for some months. He told anyone who was curious enough to question him that his master was a doctor of great reputation in spite of being still comparatively young; that he had come to this remote place in order to be quiet and carry on some special studies. It was not likely that his quiet would be disturbed, for the old castle was nothing but a big ruin, the elder branch of the family being represented by an agent, who was doubtful whether to make money out of converting the castle into a show-place, or to pull it down and sell the bricks it was built of. No one had any kind of positive idea where the present owner was. And this was the condition of an old and proud family. Everything had been

squandered; even the beautiful old family plate had long since been packed and sent to London for sale.

It was said that the worst of all the succession of spendthrifts who had dissipated the fine old property was the beautiful wife of the last lord, the mother of the two sons now the sole representatives of the name. She was a Hungarian of noble family according to the statements made at the time of her marriage. But the servants and peasants always declared her to be a gipsy, pure and simple, and, moreover, a witch. She was extraordinarily beautiful and fascinating, and in the few short years of their married life did with her husband whatever she fancied.

Her death had been a terrible one, and the poor people firmly believed that her ghost haunted the old castle in which her luxuriously furnished rooms, decked in a quaint barbaric fashion, were still to be seen, hardly touched since her death. Even the agent, whose one idea seemed to be to sell anything convertible into money, had left her many costly ornaments in their accustomed places. Some kind of superstitious feeling kept him from having these rooms stripped. He had been in great terror of the beautiful chatelaine during her life, and possibly he had not shaken off that fear even now. It was the only theory by which to account for the reverence with which these rooms were treated, for her son had given no orders about them.

The new resident at the Dower House lived in great seclusion and quite alone, save for his two foreign servants, who appeared to do for him all that he needed. He was a great rider, but the hours he spent out of doors were usually those of the very early morning, so that he was seldom seen. It was soon discovered, however, that he was an extraordinarily handsome man, in the prime of life. All sorts of rumours at once were circulated about him. A recluse is expected to be old, crooked, eccentric in manner. Why should this man, to whom life would be supposed to have every attraction possible, shut himself up in absolute solitude? He was met now and again by one of the labourers who had to rise with the dawn and go to work, evidently returning from a walk. Such habits as these, to the sloth-loving English peasant, could only indicate the restlessness of a mind diseased or guilty. Yet there was something in the face of the man which forbade this mode of accounting for his peculiar tastes from being even talked of; the dullest mind could not but recognise the power and strength shown in that beautiful face.

His servants always called him "Monsieur," giving him no name. They appeared to think the peasants of too little importance to require any more detailed information; and as no letters ever came to the Dower House, no name was associated with its resident. This, in itself, seemed odd; but common persons soon get used to a custom of that kind, and think no more of it once the first shock is over.

As a matter of fact, however, it is impossible to remain incognito in a civilized country for long together. Some prying person, possessed of a kind of officialism, is sure to disturb the temporary peace of this form of oblivion. In this case the agent did it. He rode up to the Dower House one day, got off his horse, and sent in his name. In a few moments he was ushered into a room which he did not recognise, so completely was its

appearance changed since he had seen it last. It was entirely hung with tapestry on which were worked figures of the most life-like character; warriors, women in dresses of different periods, monks and clowns. These were not formed into groups and pictures as is usual upon tapestry, but were marshalled round the room, like so many witnesses of any scene which might take place within it. So real was the effect that the agent himself misdoubted whether the interview was indeed a tête-à-tête one, when his host came forward to meet him.

He was dressed in a grey shooting suit, the simplest dress possible for an Englishman to wear in the country. Yet it so well suited and set off his splendid figure and face, that his visitor was for a moment startled into silence. When he found self-possession enough to speak, it was with much more than his usual gravity.

"I presume, sir," he said, "that you have some reason for being here without letting the people know who you are; though it seems a strange thing to do, for you must be recognised, sooner or later. I have not seen you since you were a child, but your likeness to your mother is unmistakeable; Yes I know that Sir Harold Veryan is at present in Africa. I presume I am speaking to Ivan Veryan."

"You are right," was the answer. "I had no serious intention of concealing my identity, for that would be absurd. But my servants habitually call me M'sieu, finding my name a difficulty; and as the poor people here have no recollection of me, I should prefer that they remain ignorant of who I am. I wish for complete solitude here, not to assume the position of the next heir, who may be supposed to take an interest in the fate of the castle, the condition of the cottages, and the felling of the timber."

"If you, wanted seclusion this seems the last place to come to," observed the agent.

"I find a seclusion here which suits me, for the time being," was the reply. "I only want one thing - a key to one of the doors of the castle, as I came here partly to use its library - unless all the books have been sold."

"The books have not been touched," replied the agent, "the library was one of Lady Veryan's favourite rooms, and none of them have been disturbed."

"Then I shall be glad to have the key as soon as you can hand it to me."

"And you wish no one told of your presence here?" inquired the agent, doubtfully.

"Who should care to know of it?"

"The county families" he said hesitatingly wishing very much for permission to retail his piece of gossip at the next market-day in the county town. There was always a middle-day dinner at the biggest hotel, where all sorts of magnates and men of property and business met and talked; and he would have interested the whole tableful if he could have

informed them that one of the Veryans had actually returned to England and was living in his own house.

"If I wish to see any of my neighbours I will call on them," was the decided answer, "till then, I should prefer that nothing is said about me."

The [voice] of command with which this was spoken made it final. The agent said nothing more on the subject, but soon took his leave. Later in the day a messenger came to the Dower House with a key of the castle gate, and a key of one of the doors of the castle.

Chapter XXX

The old castle of the Veryans - which was a queer building, roomy, rambling, not beautiful, but very strong and amply veiled with green ivy, stood on high ground, looking well over land and sea. It was not sheltered like the Dower House but faced all fortunes of weather, confident in its own strength. No tree stood close to it, for the position was too exposed. But gardens which had once been glorious, and even now were beautiful with the remains of their past glory, stretched on every side. They had the supreme charm, unknown to modern gardens, of never being flowerless. All the year round, even in the bitterest weather, lines and stars of colour made the ground beautiful. Along the cliff edge of the garden two high walls were built; and between these was the Lady's Walk - a place of delight to any sightseer who might stray to this deserted place. A wide gravel path went straight down its centre, forming a wonderfully dry promenade. On each side were wide flower beds full of rare plants that grew well in this sheltered spot; and the walls were covered with fruit trees; and blooming creepers which flourished luxuriantly. On the side of the sea were openings in the wall, here and there; and seats were placed in sheltered, sunny nooks, from which the grand view might be seen.

It was to the Lady's Walk that Ivan went direct, as soon as he entered the castle grounds that same evening. The flower-beds were neglected and overgrown, tile creepers, untrimmed and hanging in thick masses from the walls. The place was all the more beautiful from this neglect just overlying the high and careful cultivation of the past. It was like the languor of a tired beauty, her hair loose and undressed, but its richness undimmed.

Ivan wandered up and down the path for a long time, full of thought, very grave, yet sometimes smiling faintly. It was the early spring, and small yellow flowers were peering out here and there, some on the ground, some, on the walls. This colour, which is so associated with the birth of the year, had a meaning of its own for Ivan. He stopped often to look at these flowers, but he did not pluck them. He never picked a flower or a leaf, except for use in some definite experiment. At one end of the walk the common rose called the monthly rose, was trained upon the wall, and on this there was one delicate pink bud, half blown. This flower appeared at last to attract Ivan's attention entirely. He sat down on a bench near it, and looked at it for a long while. It was late in the afternoon,

but though the air was growing very cold the light was still strong, for the long days had begun. He sat there, apparently disinclined to move, full of thought.

A sound of footsteps disturbed him. Turning his head he saw Fleta approaching him, walking down the path with the rare, proud carriage which distinguished her.

"You left the gate open for me" she said questioningly.

" Yes," he answered.

"Then I did right to come to you here?" she said, in a reassured tone.

"Certainly, you did right," he replied. "Do not doubt your own knowledge. You have known from the first you had to meet me here."

"Yes," she answered.

Ivan had risen when she approached him, and they stood face to face. His eyes were steadily and very earnestly fixed on her. Fleta had only glanced at him, and then turned her gaze on the sea. But in the pause that followed her answer she suddenly lifted her eyes and answered his look.

"I needed the mask," she said, speaking with an evident effort; "for I was still woman enough to worship you as a splendid being of my own race. I did right to cast the mask away, and suffer as I did, because it has made my lesson shorter, if fiercer. I know now that you are not a being of my own race - supposing me still nothing more than a woman. You are divine and a teacher, and I can be nothing to you but your servant.

Teach me to serve! Teach me to, so transform this love for you that it shall become pure service, not to you, but to the divine in you. I have cut all knots; I have cast aside all that dragged me back. My duty is done and utterly fulfilled. I stand freed from the past. Teach me!

Ivan stepped to the side of the path and plucked the pink rosebud. He gave it to her. Fleta held it in her hand, but looked at it as if utterly bewildered. "Do you not know the colour?" he said. When you have entered the Hall of Learning, you will see such flowers on the altars. The purple of passion burns but to this pale pink, which also is the colour of resurrection and of dawn. Sit here till I return."

He left her and walked down the path, through the gardens, to the gate. Here Fleta's carriage was standing. He bade the man take Fleta's trunks to the village inn and leave them there till they should be fetched away, paid, and dismissed him. Then he re-entered the grounds, locking the gate behind him. He went to Fleta, where she still sat, regarding the flower she held in her hand.

"Are you ready for the offering?" he asked her.

"Yes, I am ready," she replied, without looking up.

"Come, then," he said, and turned to walk away over the grassy slopes of the garden. She rose and accompanied him. It was nearly dark now. He walked round the castle to a side door, which he opened. A deathly chill came from the interior of the building. Fleta shivered slightly as she crossed the threshold.

"Are you afraid?" said Ivan, pausing before he closed the door; "there is still time to go back."

"Back to what?" asked Fleta.

"I cannot answer that," he replied. "I do not know what you have left behind you."

"I have cut off everything," she answered. "There is nothing for me to return to. Let me go on. I am afraid of nothing now. How should I be?"

Ivan closed the door and led the way down a long passage. He opened a door and said, "Enter." Fleta, passed through it, and was immediately aware that he had shut it behind her without passing through himself that in fact she was alone.

Alone! and where? She had no notion - she only knew she was in complete darkness. For the first time she fully realised the ideas of darkness and solitude. They did not terrify her, but they presented themselves as absolute facts to her consciousness; the only facts she was conscious of. Moreover, she was vividly aware that she could not, escape from them, which made them much more intensely real! She could not guess which way to move, nor did it occur to her that she would be in any way benefitted by moving. She stepped back to the door through which she had passed, which was, to her fancy, the only link between her and the actual world, and stood there with her hand upon it.

The next thing she became conscious of was that there was no air. At all events she believed there was none, which was quite as bad as if it were so. She imagined herself in some very large place, whether a room or a hall she could not guess, which was hermetically sealed and had been so for years. Faint fancies as to what kind of place she was in formed themselves in her mind at first, but presently passed away altogether; for she had no clue or image to which to attach any picture. Her mind became quite blank. Presently she became aware that she had lost, all sense of time. She could not tell if, she had been standing in this way for minutes or for hours. Her sensations were extraordinarily acute, and yet to her they hardly seemed to exist, because there was nothing objective for them to be marked by. In a little while, the moment when Ivan had ushered her into this place had become removed to an immense distance, in the past, and presently she found herself thinking of Ivan as a figure in her life which had entirely retreated from it; she could not imagine that she would see him tomorrow; for tomorrow appeared to her no longer to be possible. This black night looked like an eternity. No danger or adventure which she had ever experienced had affected her like this. She was completely unprepared for such a sudden fall into the abyss of nothingness. And yet she

had just strength enough to stand against it by summoning the philosophy which told her never to fear anything, for nothing could in reality injure her. She kept her mind and nerves from being affected by steadily recollecting this. But she was unable to stem a wave of exhaustion which gradually swept over her and which made her tremble as she stood.

It was the incredible completeness of the silence and darkness which baffled her and at last daunted her. No creak or groan sounded in the house, no echo of wind or sea came to her. At last she began to doubt if she was alive or whether, instead of passing through a door, she had stepped into some deep water and met death unconsciously. But she had too much experience, too great a knowledge of life and of death, to be deceived so easily. She would never have succumbed even so far as she had done, so far as to be physically unnerved to any extent, but that she had been anticipating some experience of an entirely different character. She believed she had offered her heart, had lived past the mistakes which hitherto had held her back, and that she would have been able to ask direct help from her master and obtain it. Something friendly, quiet, natural, had been more in her expectations than anything else. Instead of which she found herself facing the most extraordinary experience she had ever been through.

The complete and absolute silence wrought on her physical sensibilities more than any other circumstance. She found she was watching the silence, listening to it, and that she dreaded to move, that she held her breath in some vague and unreasonable dread of disturbing it.

It seemed to be a positive fact instead of a negative one, this complete and immovable silence. Then suddenly a power appeared to rise within her to oppose this fact - a power stronger than it. And as the feeling came to her, the silence broke, and a soft shower of music rilled the air - something as tender as tears and as lovely as sunshine. The keenest pleasure filled Fleta's soul, and she leaned against the door and listened. But suddenly a thought darted into her mind: "The silence is here still - this music is only my own imagination, filling the hateful void!" And as the thought came the silence returned. Fleta fell on her knees. It was the first time she had moved since she entered this place. With the movement came a whole rushing tide of emotions, of phantasmagoria - feelings, of fancies, a great passing ??? She saw Ivan standing at her side, but she would not even turn to look at him, for she knew this was only an image created by her longing. She saw the place in which she was, suddenly lit and full of people. It was a great hall, gloomy and vast. There was a moving crowd in it of persons dressed very brilliantly.

"Ah" cried Fleta, in a voice of despair, "that I should be so cheated by my own fancies is too terrible." and with the sound of her voice, the darkness returned, closing heavily in upon her. She rose and drew herself up to her full height. A consciousness of what she was actually experiencing had come, and she became instantly calm and strong.

"I refuse," she said aloud, "to go through this neophyte's exercise. I am not the slave of my senses any longer. I dominate them; I see beyond them. Come you to me, thou that art my own self, and that art pure, impalpable, unsubstantial, without glamour. Come you

and guide me, for there is none other and nothing else on which my consciousness has power to rest."

She leaned back against the door, for she was trembling with the force of her own fierce effort. The door and the floor on which she stood, were now her only links with the actual or material world. She knew of nothing else; it appeared to her as though she had forgotten the material world knew not whether she lived or died; certainly the power of hope or of fear was leaving her. She became indifferent to everything except the desire to hold her own higher self, her pure soul in view; her longing to face herself, and so find some certainty and knowledge, swallowed up every other desire. She remained a long time, resolutely fixing her whole intensity of will on this, and waited, expecting in a moment to see the starry figure close in front of her. Once she saw it, quite distinctly; but it was like a marble statue, lifeless. She knew this was no reality, only her own imagining, and her power and strength began slowly to leave her after this cold vision.

If unconsciousness could have come to her now, it would have come like rain to a parched land. Her brain was on fire, her heart like lead. But nothing came to her, nothing became visible. And then she knew that she had offered up not only the physical senses and emotion, but the psychic senses and power.

Again she fell on her knees, and clasping her hands fell into an attitude as if of prayer. In reality she was in profound meditation. As in a long series of pictures, she now saw herself passing through innumerable experiences. She saw herself, and without anger, regret, or pain, suffer, and enjoy. She watched her slow separation from those who loved her, even until, now when Ivan left her in the hour of trial. She had passed through fiery trials and all the tests of the passions and emotions. But these were as nothing beside this mysterious blank, this great chasm of darkness, which seemed to be not only outside her, but actually within her own soul.

How was it to end? Was there any end? Or was this the state to which her labours had brought her triumphantly, and in which she must remain? Impossible. This was not life; it was death. And was not her effort to attain to life in its essential vitality? Death surely could not be the final king!

Fleta, the powerful, the disciple, as she had imagined herself, with knowledge, thus doubted and despaired. Her confidence left her when she saw this blankness which lay before her.

So it must be always with the unknown.

Suddenly a new mood fell on her. She began to dread lest she should see forms and shapes, or conjure up the voice or features of anyone she knew or loved. Most of all, she dreaded to see again the image of Ivan at her side.

"If I see this," she said to herself, "then indeed I shall be fallen back into the world of forms. I must not look for anything but darkness." At this moment a hand was very gently

laid on her hair. Fleta was not so completely unnerved as to tremble or cry out; yet the shock of the sudden contact shook her so that she could not speak or move. Then came a voice:

"My child," said a very gentle voice, which sounded like a woman's, "do you not know that out of chaos must come order, out of darkness light, out of nothingness something? Neither state is permanent. Do not make the mistake of dreading or welcoming the return to the world of forms after having become one with the formless."

Fleta made no answer. She was aware that there was some deep familiarity about this voice which as yet, she could not understand. She was at home, like a child with its mother. All fear, all anxiety, all doubt, had dropped from her.

"You must not die under this ordeal," said the voice, "and you have been here many hours. Come with me, and I will take you to a quiet place where you can rest."

Fleta rose; a hand was put into hers. When she attempted to move she realised that she must, indeed, have been here a long time, for she was entirely numbed and helpless, and found it almost impossible to use her limbs. She put out her right hand mechanically, as if to balance herself, and was much startled by being unable to stretch her arm. - Immediately she touched a wall close to her. In a moment she understood that she was in no large hall, but in a small, narrow cell, scarcely wide enough for two steps to be taken in it. This seemed to her very strange, for she had so positively believed herself to be in some very spacious place.

"How wide my fancy is!" she thought, almost, smiling to herself. For now she was at peace, without any anxiety, though she knew not where she was or who was with her.

[Part II of Blossom and the Fruit, continued by H.P. Blavatsky](#)

The Blossom and the Fruit. A True Story of a Black Magician

by Mabel Collins

[Part I](#) - [Part II](#) - [Part III](#)

Chapter XXXI

A door opened and shut. Fleta found herself in a soft, warm atmosphere, lit by a pale rosy light. At first it seemed as if she could not see or distinguish between the objects before her. But after a moment her ordinary sight came suddenly to her.

She was in a very strangely furnished room. Like the room Ivan used at the Dower House, it was hung with tapestry on which were life-size figures so cunningly worked that they looked real at first sight, and always produced the appearance rather of statues than of a flat presentment. The floor was uncarpeted and entirely covered with dried ferns and withered leaves. A quantity of these were gathered into a heap and on them was spread a tiger skin and a great rug of sheep's wool. This was very near the wide hearth, on which burned a wood fire. It was not a very large fire, but to Fleta's chilled form the warmth from it seemed delicious. The light came from a shaded lamp which stood on a bracket fastened above the chimney. In front of the hearth wall a three-legged wooden stool on which was a large and most beautifully chased silver salver, holding bread, and milk and fruit on silver dishes and in Venetian glass of the most delicate sort.

Fleta looked about her with a faint and almost pleased amusement at the quaint incongruity of these furnishings. They gave her the same sense of homeliness which the unknown voice had given her. After her first glance round she went straight to the fire, and began to eat the cakes and drink the milk prepared for her. She sat on the leaf-strewn ground; for there was neither chair nor table nor anything to be called furniture in the whole room, except this wooden stool.

This was the dead chatelaine's own room. Beyond it stretched a suite of rooms opening one into another, which had all been hers during her life, and were quaintly and barbarously furnished; these were shown to visitors. But this room was never entered. It was said that as during her life so after her death, the lamp burned in the room at night, and the fire on the hearth night and day, and none knew who tended them!

It was thoroughly the home of a gipsy, a nomad, a creature of the woods and fields. She had slept on the tiger-skin as she might have slept on it beneath the skies. The rich salver and the rich service on it showed out oddly amid these surroundings; but they were, characteristic too, belonging as they did to the rich family which she had helped to destroy.

An extraordinary sense of peace and quiet was in this room. It penetrated to Fleta's heart and soothed her more than any living touch could have done. Presently she rose and laid herself down on the bed of skins and leaves. She did not know that Ivan's mother had lain on this same bed. Doubtless she might have discovered it had she tried, but she was careless. She was content, and that was enough. In a little while she was fast asleep.

When she awoke the lamp was out, the curtains were drawn back from the great windows of the room, and the sunlight streamed in through them. The fire on the hearth burned steadily, and the moment Fleta looked at it she saw that it had been fed and tended. The stool stood by it, and on it the salver with all manner of provisions for her to breakfast. She found herself very hungry; for, as a matter of fact, her physical body was busy recovering from the severe hardships of the recent weeks. There was a fount of natural youth within Fleta, apart from that which depended on the exercise of her will. It was a right of her condition, a permanent fee - which she had earned.

After she had breakfasted she went to the window and looked out. A wide pale sea bathed in keen spring sunshine. She longed to go out and feel the air that came from it. Immediately she turned and approached the door of the room, although she dreaded a little passing through the place she had entered by. But there was no sign of this place; and she found at last another door hidden by the tapestry of the room. It opened upon a beautiful bathroom, the floor and bath of marble and the walls painted with dancing figures - a number of guests from a ball, or some other gaiety, dressed in fantastic costumes, appeared to be careering round the room.

She bathed herself in the refreshing water, and then, wrapping herself again in her large cloak, went through the farther door. This admitted her to a large sitting-room with a magnificent view of the sea. It was very strangely and beautifully furnished, but it did not interest her; and it had the peculiarly dreary feeling which belongs to an uninhabited place. She walked quickly through it and came on to a landing from which a great oak staircase led, both up and down. There were other rooms of the same character farther on; but she did not care to pursue the study of them; she longed to be out in the open and feel the breath of the sea. She went down the wide stairway quickly; but suddenly she was brought to a standstill by meeting with a great iron door which was closed, and which absolutely shut the way. Below it, in the steps, were gun holes; and Fleta shivered a little as she stood here, wondering what ugly tragedy in the past this barricade referred to. She never dreamed of it really being closed on her, and tried it again and, again. But closed it was, and very safely locked.

She returned and went on through the other rooms. There was no way out from them. She went up the staircase to the rooms above. These were a similar suite, also without any other exit. Then in some wonder she returned to the room she had slept in and began to search for the door by which she had entered. She could not discover it. Evidently it was a secret door, and search was useless. Throwing aside her cloak, she went and sat down by the fire and began to think earnestly over her position.

It was very clear that she was a prisoner. Her mind turned to Ivan. It was he who had ushered her into that place of darkness. Doubtless, then, he had also sent her her mysterious deliverer. For a little while this thought brought her comfort. But a moment later she saw her folly. Had she not forfeited Ivan's guardianship by her very longing for it?

She was facing the great problem which man still finds before him, even after innumerable incarnations and ceaseless efforts.

Was it indeed impossible for her to sever her link with humanity? Must she always cling to her master and look to his personal self for protection and strength?

It seemed as if for the first time she was able to ask herself this dispassionately. She had freed herself from every other link, from all else that held her back. And now she stood confronted by the rebellion of her own nature.

She sat by the hearth and fell into deep, active thought, in which it seemed as though she held a very serious conversation with herself.

She, the supreme, the powerful, the priestess and heroine in many lives, who in past incarnations had been the accomplished magician and intelligent pupil of the divine teachers, she was brought close now, after ages of development, to the kernel of difficulty in her own heart.

It is the same in everyone who is capable of love, of sympathy, of any tenderness or deep emotion; this kernel exists within. In the selfish man it is given powerful vitality, and grows so large that it absorbs his whole being. In the man with divine possibilities it grows hourly less and less as he develops, till at last he comes to the terrible moment which Fleta was now suffering. He finds then that there is some one being - perhaps a dependent creature, an invalid, or a little child, who affords him a purpose for which to live.

Fleta knew herself to be on the great white sea of impersonal life. It was as though she floated on this vast water and saw no horizon nor desired to see any, nor yet to find any resting-place. But there was one tiny fertile island, or one little peopled boat, to which her eyes wandered always. She did not wish to go to it, to reach it, to touch it - only she could not conceive enduring the blank which would be left, if that one speck vanished from the universe and was not. This that she gazed on and that her sight clung to, was Ivan, his life, his purpose, his knowledge. She realised now that it was the consciousness that this point was there for her thought to rest on, which had carried her through the ordeal of blankness to which she had been exposed.

Therefore, she knew she had not succeeded; she had failed, and the deliverer who had come to her had only come to save her body from exhaustion and illness. That gentle voice had not brought to her the reward of success; only the pity given to the unsuccessful. Realising this, Fleta set herself to deal with the problem by thought.

This is the hardest way to deal with it. But Fleta was courageous, and having failed in the easier effort, was determined to be successful in this heavier one. The sun was high in the heavens, and the sea was like shining silver. But Fleta had forgotten sun and sea and the sweet air she had but just now been longing for. The sun fell to the edge of the waters, and still she sat motionless. Darkness came and found her too absorbed in thought to be aware of any change. The fire on the hearth burned out, the lamp remained unlit. As the time passed on the suffering within her grew more intense, more bitter, more biting. She, the powerful, began to realise her powerlessness. This spot within her was ineradicable. As in the past night she had been physically conscious, through all her phantasies, of that door against which she leaned, and which formed a link between her and the physical world; so now her deep veneration for Ivan's personal character remained as an immovable bond between her and humanity, however she might otherwise raise her whole consciousness.

It appeared plain to her at last that if she succeeded in destroying this she would destroy her own life with it. As she recognised this, and acknowledged the uselessness of her effort, the soft touch came on her again, and the gentle voice fell on her ears.

"My, child, be warned. Long not too ardently for success, or you will overbalance yourself on the high place you have reached, and find yourself in the bottomless abyss, a magician and no more, one of the evil ones of the earth. There is yet a third way open to you. Will you serve Ivan like a slave, obeying him as you would obey someone to whom you had sold your very soul, surrendering all judgment to him?"

"No!" cried Fleta, throwing back her head. Her eyes opened on the black darkness of the room. Whom had she spoken to? Her strength was gone, and with this cry of defiance and pride, exhaustion overpowered her and she fell back unconscious.

Chapter XXXII

The whole nobility of her nature had risen up to resist that fierce but awful temptation placed before her in the moment of her greatest weakness. To be his slave! She knew it now, as she had never known it before; she knew that she loved him. She, who had interpreted the highest mysteries to Otto and to Hilary!

She, who had burned her soul on the altar! Yes, it was so. Purified utterly, deprived of every gross quality - yet *it* remained, it was love. What a temptation was this, so suddenly offered her, when she had almost maddened herself by her despairing efforts! What a revulsion of feeling rushed over her! It was unendurable. She had the courage and the power to refuse it before she succumbed to the emotion it produced.

When she awoke again it was to realise all this in a flash. And as she awoke she suffered a sensation never yet known to her while she had been Fleta, the strong. It was the sharp sting of a tortured heart. Oh, that moment of waking! How dreadful it is. But Fleta had gathered some strength from her sleep. She had no idea how long it had lasted.

She awoke to such a turmoil of feeling as she had not experienced in the whole of her strange life. Hitherto, she had been able to hold herself above emotion; conscious of it, yet apart from it. But now it seemed as though she were paying a long debt, all at once.

"I am a Woman still, after all," she said wearily to herself. Then she sat up and looked round her. While she slept, the room had been made like a home again. The light burned softly, the fire was lit, and the silver tray stood ready for her. A sense of fierce exhaustion took possession of her at the sight of it. She sprang up and ate some food, but while she ate and drank she moved restlessly about. This was not the quiet, powerful Fleta who had conquered and won in so many strange battles. But in those former battles she had fought against the passions of others; now she was fighting herself.

She set down the cup of milk, and clasping her hands behind her began to pace to and fro, to and fro, all the length of the great room, from end to end. Her trailing dress swept the withered leaves hither and thither, till a long bare pathway was made where she moved. As she was turning back from the curtained window she saw the door open, and Ivan entered the room. He stood still and regarded her very earnestly.

"The tiger within you is strong," he said. "I need not tempt it. Know this, that I think it needless to practise such tests on you as you yourself have had power to use with Hilary Estanol, else I would have sent my shadow to mock and tempt you. It is unnecessary. Your imagination is powerful enough to bring before you every temptation from which it would be possible for you to suffer. Why then should I tease you with images?"

Fleta made no answer, though he paused. She stood silently gazing before her, as though something was visible to her which held all her attention. "Do you see your own image?" he said, with a faint smile, noticing this look in her face.

"Yes, it has accompanied me always since you entered this place. Be careful; you are creating a creature with which you will have to wrestle. Do not let it grow too strong, or there will come a day when you must test your strength against it - and perhaps you may succumb in the battle. Are you pleased with it? Do you like it? It does but reflect your thoughts. You have refused to listen to those thoughts, but they were strong enough to create this image of a passionate woman which follows and annoys me wheresoever I go. Come, be strong, and banish it as you banished Adine."

Fleta drew herself up, and seemed to rise far above her usual height, and raised her hands with a commanding gesture. A moment later she fell back a step, she seemed to dwarf suddenly, to stoop as if old age had fallen upon her.

"It is well," he said, "you have destroyed that creature. Now it is easier for you to work on. Rouse yourself, listen to me. Do you know who has waited on you here, and guarded you?"

"No" she answered dully.

"You have been haunted - visited by a gentle shape of airy elements, once my mother's servant - nothing else. It knew you must have a friend, and so it came to you in this shape. More than that - it has kept this place for you and for your work here."

"Was it foreseen then?" inquired Fleta.

"Certainly; this spot is full of the elements you want, and they have been preserved for you. But the service, is over. The poor ghost, as ignorant people supposed it to be, has dwelled in this abnormal shape long enough for your use. Wake yourself, rouse yourself, for you have to be sole guardian of your own fate henceforward. Otherwise you must surrender this effort."

"I shall not surrender it," replied Fleta. "I am ready to go on, at any cost."

"Be it so," he said. "Then I have a history to tell you. Listen."

He went to the hearth and stood by it, leaning against the mantelshelf. Fleta remained standing, as she had stood since his entrance, but now instead of looking vaguely before her she fixed her gaze on him.

"My ancestors came to this country with an army of conquerors, but they came to save the land and implant a growth upon it which should redeem it in its unhappy future. The conflicting forces on this island are terrific. It is eaten up by a giant growth of materialism springing from the blackness of its psychic nature. Listen, Fleta; you must remember these things. There is a wind that comes across England, bringing with it a whole mass of invisible beings which settle on it and spread over it and darken the psychic and moral atmosphere. It is they who make it so great although it is so small; it is they who bring it power and wealth. But they obscure the sky above. They are like the thoughts of men, which, when centred on matters of one form of life too steadily, make a mental veil which conceals from them the conception of larger and wider forces of life. In fact, these beings are little else than such thoughts individualised and grown powerful. There is a great belt of the globe in which they live most powerfully, being led always by the races of men who dwell in that belt and who continue through century after century, and aeon after aeon, in living within the horizon of materialism. But there is another power, a counteracting one, also on this island. Through all history and before it there has been a profound life dwelling side by side with this dark one, and the knowledge of the obscure and great facts of existence have found a narrow but permanent home here. There are points in England which, when an occultist looks at the country, shine out like flames. They are the ancient and hereditary centres of this inner life. London, Birmingham, Manchester, show on the maps, and stand out in most men's minds; and the railways lead to these places.

But there is a shining track right across and through the island visible to a seer; and the points on this track have always the astral flame alight. This castle is one of them. This room has been preserved absolutely, darkness never having been allowed to reign in it, until last night, when you, in your struggle with yourself, permitted it to enter. Here is a

perfected atmosphere, but it is quiescent. I have come to this country to fulfil one of the duties of my life. I have to wake this atmosphere, to make it again a living thing.

When it has been done here it has to be done at other points on the track. This must be done now, or the track would grow faint and the power would pale, and in the next generation it would be harder to find. This task I want your aid in."

Fleta made no answer. It did not appear to her that any answer was possible or necessary. She had experienced a dull and bitter shock while he was speaking. She had recognised at once that it was part of her training, and although she scarcely understood its character immediately, she accepted it without complaint, even in her heart.

But now in the silence that followed, and which Ivan did not break for some time, the knowledge came to her of what this pain was which hurt her so keenly. She, who had lived so long for others, who had sacrificed herself so utterly for their salvation was hungry for some help for herself, some personal guidance, some stray word of help, or encouragement. Instead, she was given a more impersonal task than any she had yet undertaken. A bitter sense of the uselessness and hopelessness of life overcame her. Of what use was aid given to the crowd of men if, after all, the persons who made up that crowd were indeed to have no greater sum of happiness? This question took shape in her mind, and at last seemed to fill it. She was standing moodily, her eyes now fixed on the ground. Suddenly some impulse made her look up, and she saw close beside her a creature, neither man nor woman, yet human in shape, with fierce eyes burning with passion, which were fixed on her and appeared to express by their gaze the thought in her mind. A moment, and the shape was gone - a dim cloud which had been in the room was gone also; and Ivan was standing quietly before her, regarding her very seriously.

"That is one of the beings from whom I desire to deliver this race of men," he said.

So saying he turned and left the room.

Wearied out, and very sad, Fleta laid down on the rugs which made her couch, and closing her eyes, tried to rest. But immediately this creature which she had seen returned to her, and appeared more vivid and real than before.

But its shape was altered, or rather it changed by degrees before her eyes. It was like a horrible nightmare to watch the change, for Fleta had enough knowledge to be perfectly aware that she herself, by her suppressed thought and emotion, was actually forming this thing into a human shape. It was Ivan who stood before her after a few seconds, Ivan, with the sternness gone from his face, and a gentle light upon it instead.

He approached her, and Fleta watched him with a fascination, which seemed to hold her like fetters of iron. "Because you work for humanity there is no reason to sacrifice your own happiness," he said, in a softer voice than she had ever heard from his lips.

"I shall claim your absolute devotion to the work, it is true; but, remember, you will be associated with me through it all. We shall be together. The very nature of the work will bring us together. Will not that give you a little pleasure? We need not be apart any more, Fleta, now that you are with me in my work. Be it so; the order and law of life have decreed this. We have not looked for the pleasure for ourselves. It has come to us. Why not take it without question, as the flowers take the sunshine?"

He drew a step nearer to her, and this one step seemed to break the spell that held Fleta; it was more than she could endure. With a wild shriek she sprang to her feet.

"Go, devil!" she cried out. "I am stronger than you, subtle though you are!"

The Blossom and the Fruit. A True Story of a Black Magician

by Mabel Collins

[Part I](#) - [Part II](#)

Chapter XXXIII

How dark - how dull, and quiet and still! Fleta woke to this consciousness and to nothing more. All life, and fire, and hope, seemed to have left the world. And why? That was what she asked herself the moment she awoke. But before she could attempt to answer the Question she had awakened. It had not been sleep. What sort of unconsciousness had it been? A moment after and a full knowledge of it all came to her.

She was like a person who has seen death suddenly, and been deprived by death of the one beloved creature in all the world. Yes, that was the meaning of this un-utterable pain.

She looked back and saw herself - how long ago she could not tell - banishing from her the being she had so dearly loved; banishing him so utterly in that form, that he was in fact, dead.

She desired him as her master, not as a lover, not even as a friend. She had talked and thought of this act of renunciation before now many a time; but, as happens always with any great event in life, she had had no conception of the reality and agony of the thing until it was upon her. It was like tearing out her heart-strings. And the pain went on, or rather grew in intensity.

Through ages she had suffered alone and stood alone and acted alone. But she had never before faced that last and final and most awful isolation of the occultist; she had never been without love for any human being. Her heart had always clung to someone, perhaps often, to someone weaker than herself. But now - there was nothing for its tendrils to cling to. She had destroyed the last image left her, the last idol which had not already been destroyed by the development and circumstances of life. She had struck a death-blow to the power of her imagination in connection with Ivan, and now that it was done, she knew looking back, how for years of her life that figure, created by her imagination, had been beside her. Never had she consciously recognised it till now, when her stronger and finer nature had instantly taken the initiative and killed it out; but she had been consoled and comforted, and indeed supported by it through her severest struggles in the past. Well, it was gone; and she was utterly alone even in thought.

The pain which was caused by this state arose from the sense of dullness, darkness, void. With an effort she thought of Ivan; and the thought was weariness. His image no longer brought her enthusiasm, faith, longing, as it used to do.

What then was there to live for? Nothing. That was what she said to herself as she lay listlessly on her strange couch of withered leaves and furs and looked wearily at the strange bare room. Her eyes closed from mere want of purpose. But they had hardly shut before they were opened wide again, and she was staring before her with a gaze of horror. Slowly she raised herself up and sat there like one petrified. No horrid sight, no ordeal, had ever stricken her soul like this. Was it possible to go on living, without interest, without affection, objectless, heartless? No! For no ghost or devil could vie with this unutterable void within for horror. She crouched - yes, Fleta, the powerful, the confident - she crouched before this vision of her own emptiness.

It was impossible to go on living in this manner. Yet to Fleta there was no alternative as there is to ordinary men and women. Suicide offered no opportunity to her. She knew that she had advanced too far to find oblivion anywhere. Death would bring no respite; she would carry memory with her, and wake to it afresh, as people wake to the pain of some new grief after sleep. - She saw herself going on through aeons of existence, blank, hopeless, heartless, for what was there to fill her horizon. What was there to hope for? Who was there to love? None! Nothing! These were all her answers. And she needed none but herself to answer them; she questioned her own soul and found her replies within it. She desired no speech of anyone, not even of Ivan, for she could not imagine that any comfort could come to her from it. Poor Fleta! she tasted now the complete bitterness of failure and the despair it brings. And comfort was what she wanted! Yes, her whole being was hungry for it. But there was none for her.

She found herself back, far back, ranged beside the stoic philosopher. What an arid, intolerable waste was life thus viewed!

The moments were so weary and so full of pain that it appeared as if each were an eternity in itself. She rose at last goaded, by disgust of her endurance, and began to pace the room to and fro, to and fro, in a kind of madness. How long was it since she had suffered like this? Not since that flowery long ago, that age of bloom and pain beneath the wild apricot trees. She was as blind, as full of longing, of a wild, and useless desire for action, now as then. Was it then wasted, all this long and terrible noviciate of hers? Wasted? As the thought came to her, she stood, passion-struck, her hands clasped rigidly together. If so, then indeed there was no choice. Madness must be king, and hell the kingdom.

We all know, as the span of human life wears itself out, the agony of anxiety and the despair of loss, which personal love brings with it. To us all, sooner or later, must come the overpowering pains, the one consummate moment of distress, when a personal love, is forever torn away from the soul. Fleta was not ignorant - she was blind, for the wall she faced had no way, through it, no window in it. But she was not ignorant. She knew the ordeal she was enduring, she knew its nature. This knowledge seemed to add the keenest sting, the final torture. For she knew that if she could not endure she must sink back into the blank darkness of ordinary human life. She was at the door of initiation; she knew it - and none may linger there - he must enter or turn back.

And it seemed to her - to Fleta the strong - that entrance was impossible. She could not endure this pain - she had not the strength.

She turned back in her thoughts to Hilary Estanol - could she have lived for him, even in this one life? Impossible! She would have wearied of the bondage of love in an hour. She could not even have given him any happiness, so immeasurable was the distance between them. What use was it to look back, knowing this? Otto - no! still less. And then her mind swung back to the thought of Ivan; and Etrenella's words flashed into her memory:

"You must go to the door of hell to find him." Well, she was there now! But what folly had Etrenella spoken! It was absurd to suppose she had any power to save Ivan - it was absurd to suppose that he could love her even for an instant - except as his pupil. - And yet what was that figure which had sickened her so utterly by its temptings? Was not that the figure of Ivan? No - she answered herself - it was a phantom, born of her own passion. In that sense, then, all Etrenella said might be true - she prophesied this hideous moment. And this hell, now yawning before Fleta, might be as much of a phantom as Ivan's image!

"It is so," said a gentle voice, "and it will vanish as Ivan's image vanished."

Fleta recognised the voice of the tender presence which had twice come to her before in her bitterest moments. Without moving or looking round she replied: "But how am I to save my master? Surely that must have been a lie."

"Draw on your cloak and follow where I lead," was the answer.

Fleta obeyed. Her cloak lay where she had thrown it when she had come back to this room disgusted at finding herself a prisoner. She put it on and turned to follow her guide, but no one was visible; and for a moment she stood confused and bewildered. A moment later and she had recalled her knowledge. She knew that she must simply obey her instinct. She left the room and went through the next and out on to the stairway. The great gate stood open; she passed down and found herself in the great hall of the castle. The door stood ajar, and she went out into the air.

Now came a certain perplexity again - which way was she to turn? But she had will enough to control her vague desire for guidance, and to compel herself to follow her own spiritual instinct. It was late in the evening, and the stars shone; she looked at them and at the dark sea - what desolation there is in the beauty of nature only those know who have really suffered. She hurried away over the grass, determined to let her feet find their own way and use her will to silence her mind. This was how she had found Ivan in this, to her, unknown country. She had to find him again in the same manner; it seemed a little more difficult to compel herself to the task now, because, her soul was so full of fierce rebellion.

In a few moments she was at the door of Ivan's cottage. She went in without hesitation, for the door stood open. She paused on the threshold of a lighted room, looking in

wonder at the scene before her. It seemed to be full of people, so real did the figures on the tapestry appear. Ivan sat at a large table which had nothing on it but a great map outspread. Fleta's occult knowledge, not utterly lost to her, awakened fully in the rapt atmosphere she found herself in

Ivan sat a long while studying the map, and then looked round at the figures on the wall. These changed in appearance sometimes, and Fleta knew at once that they were to learn what the lay figure in her laboratory had been to her. But she had never had the power to control more than this one, though she could impose upon it a series of personalities, while here she saw Ivan influencing a great number of persons by the same magical process; and after a few moments observation her heart began to beat high, for she saw with what great stakes he was playing. The figures had taken on the characters of kings, princes, emperors, diplomats, politicians. The fate of Europe, and, later on, the fate of the whole civilized surface of the globe, appeared to be in this man's hand, or rather in his thoughts.

Fleta, looking from the walls to the map, saw that the central point in the whole drama which was being enacted was that monastery, in her father's forests. This was protected, made powerful, kept hidden; and in order that this might be so, war devastated whole countries. The sight, made so plainly visible to her, filled her soul with compassion, and she uttered a cry of dismay. Ivan turned and looked at her.

"Oh, have pity!" she said. "What does the fate of our Order matter compared to that of these poor wretches, these masses of humanity who have no life but in humanity?"

There came on Ivan's face a faint smile of extraordinary sweetness.

"My child," he said, "understand that the Order exists upon earth and in human form simply for the benefit of these masses of humanity, to save them from a darkness and helplessness worse than hell. It is right, then, that they should give their lives to preserve it in existence from one generation to another. Is it not so?"

"Yes," she answered reluctantly, but it is terrible to see these sufferings! these dead men, these broken hearts, these desolate homes! Oh, master, have pity!

"Is your heart empty now?" said Ivan.

"No!" she cried out, absorbed by her thought. "It cannot be till I have helped these people. Oh, master, let me help them! - Show me the way."

"Follow in my path," answered Ivan. "It is the only one. Help their souls, not their bodies. Put aside the illusion now before you, the imagination which makes may seem to you heartless, cruel, because my sight and knowledge reaches farther than yours, and calculates for greater distances of time. Put this illusion aside as you have put the others - for your hell is banished already from you by the great love for man which has burst out in your heart - put this one aside also, and try to stand beside me. Work for the spirit of

humanity, not for the pleasure of its individual members, and you will find yourself a part of it, and therefore, never alone or loveless again.- Is it not so?"

"Yes," she said slowly. As she spoke she became aware that there were others besides herself and Ivan in the room. Looking round at them she started and trembled; for here were the pale, passionless, faces of the Brothers of the White Star. How beautiful they were! how tender!

"Tomorrow night," said Ivan, "you shall enter the Hall of Learning. You have earned the right and obtained the power. Go back now to your resting-place and reflect. Go in peace."

Fleta turned and left the room immediately, and slowly retraced her steps. How near the stars seemed now! How soft the sea!

Chapter XXXIV

That was a night of peace for Fleta, such as she had not had for a long time. She lay down on the tiger-skin in the corner of the haunted room - a place no man in the county would have entered alone after dark, even for a king's ransom - and slept like a tired child.

When she awoke it was dawn, and a dim, soft light came into the room through the wide windows. A profound sense of tenderness, of companionship, filled her heart. What a wonderful and beautiful thing was life when full of love like this. She was amazed at her own content, and set herself to understand the cause of it.

Immediately, she saw innumerable human faces, just touched faintly by the light of the dawn and stirring slowly towards the life of the day. - Processions of men and women passed through her consciousness - working people, beggars, toilers of all sorts; kings, queens, and counsellors, passed by also, but more faintly, for they had not the same power of number, of duplication and re-duplication, of types repeated and reproduced with endless and scarcely perceptible variation. It was this, the likeness, the similarity among the ant-like multitudes, that attracted and fascinated her, and warmed her heart with a new and hitherto unknown feeling. Before her inner vision passed all sorts of pictures - homes with sleeping children, seamstresses rising early with faded eyes to begin another day, as like the last as each of the women was like the one next to her!

Men roused from deep sleep at the first sign of daylight fit only to go out in gangs and engage on hard work for beasts; yet, perfectly natural and satisfying to their unaroused natures. Men working underground in mines, among the gnomes and salamanders, knowing as little of the gladness of sunshine as of the inspiration of the spirit. The unnumbered great race of men engaged in offices all over the world, busy with produce and money, clerks, ambitionless, alike, shrewd and yet without knowledge, their souls asleep. Women living in the streets of the cities, and in the countless houses that trade in vice, women even more alike than the men of the cities, women that are of only three or four types, and numbering millions under each of these types, as similar as the peas in one pod are to each other. Men and women with money, with wealth, not working, but looking always for pleasure and amusement - what thousands of these, too, and how little difference among them, and how little and narrow the field in which they looked for pleasure! Oh, this great surging sea of human life, what a grand, giant force would it be if once awakened, if once intelligent, impersonal, united, aware of its own spiritual dignity and meaning. "I see it! I see it" cried out Fleta.

"See your power, your possibilities, you, the human race that I am such a small fragment of. Oh, let me speak to you, rouse you, help you, work for you!"

She sprang to her feet, full of a new energy. The dawn had come fully now, the day had begun, and her work must begin too. She did not know yet what her work was to be; but, nevertheless, she knew that she must be ready for it. All weariness had fallen from her, had left her forever, as it seemed. She went into the next room and stepped into the great bath which stood there, filling it full of keenly cold water. With its freshness came a

lightness as though her youth had come back. She laughed to herself at the fancy. She could never lose her youth again, for the human race is young always as well as old! This was the thought that made her glad. For, indeed, what could it any longer concern her whether she had youth or age, beauty or ugliness, seeing that all these alike are parts of human life, forces in human nature. And with this indifference - or perhaps it would be better to say, with this wider possibility of content - came a new look on her face - a look neither of youth nor beauty, age - nor illness - something indefinable, but more permanent than any of these.

"It is well," she said to herself. "I need not be a magician any longer, or take the trouble to work miracles on myself or on others. For if I am weak, what does it matter? I shall be in the great stream of life still, and weakness can be ennobled as well as strength. As she moved to leave the room she came unexpectedly opposite to a great mirror. She stood for some moments, her brow knitted in perplexity. She scarcely recognised herself at first, her face was so changed. Its brilliance had gone, and in the place of it was an expression of quiet like that on the Egyptian statues. Her eyes wandered down, after a long, intense look at herself, to the dress she wore. And now for the first time did she realise how great an ordeal she had passed through, how far within herself she had retreated in these last hours. For she could not recollect for whom she wore this black dress. Hazy memories of different lives passed before her, when she had lost lover, husband, child, and worn this hateful colour. Who was it now? What grief was that which had unseated her reason and destroyed her memory? As she looked and wondered, at last her eyes fell on her helpless and disfigured arm. The memory of the battle in which that injury was received came suddenly back to her.

"I am Fleta!" she exclaimed. "I remember myself now, and the dark tragedies through which I have lived."

Chapter XXXV

He went out of the castle and walked over the lawn to the Lady's Walk, where she had met Ivan on her arrival. It was quite deserted now; but the sun made it pleasant, and she walked to and fro the whole length of it, with slow deliberate steps, thinking. "Of what use is it to think?" she cried out suddenly; stopping in her walk. "Have I ever learned or done anything by thought? No - I must look to some higher place for guidance."

She left the Walk and went down a long flight of steps cut in the cliff, which took her to the edge of the sea.

O, the magical charm of that morning, with its freshness and sweetness and clear light! Like a child's Fleta's heart beat higher with the excitement of the morning sea. She walked at the edge of the waves, playing with their movements and forgot all anxiety, all concern for herself or others, in the pleasure of the moment. Presently, looking up, she saw that someone was walking on the cliff. It was a black, gaunt figure, looking strangely out of place in the sunshine. In another moment she recognised Amyot, wearing his monk's dress. It was very natural he should be here, since Ivan was.

"My poor servant," she said to herself, "I had forgotten him." She went to the steps in the cliff and climbed them. When she reached the top, she looked down the sunlit path and could not at first see Amyot, but soon she found that he had seated himself on the bench that faced the sea. She went quickly and sat down beside him; but Amyot took no notice of her.

"Speak to me, Amyot," she said, gently.

He raised his head and turned his haggard face and sunken eyes towards her. "What shall I say?" he replied.

"Have you no word of greeting?"

"None. I know you no longer, you have passed in, -while I am still outside."

"I have not yet passed in." replied Fleta. "I have to demand entrance. I was told that I had to bring two souls with me, one in either hand. I have learned that this cannot be, that such a delusion was only a trick by which chains might be bound on me and on others. Yet, must I indeed go in utterly alone? You should take your place at my right hand, a child of the Brotherhood, saved by your own knowledge, your own sense of truth."

"No," answered Amyot, "it cannot be. I am weary. I do not want to go in. I have served the Brotherhood -well, but I cannot give them that last thing, the kernel of my soul, the self that is me. No, I cannot, Fleta, you are a child in the world's way, beside me. Yet I have been your servant and am no more than that now. I am too strong for success in this effort."

"Too strong! Impossible!" said Fleta. "And yet true," answered Amyot, gloomily. "I am so knit up with this world, so strongly compounded of its elements, that I cannot be separated from it without an unendurable agony worse than any sort of death. I have done all that man could do. When I found that by no other aid could I force myself to follow the necessary laws of life, nor acquire the necessary concentration, I offered myself for the service of religion. I have served truly. I, that am lost, have saved souls without number, I have done the work of the Brotherhood in the world. I, that have done that am now devoured by the world. Yes, it is useless. This life in which I have endeavoured expiation, in which I have worn this dress, has been blameless, has brought to me only suffering. But the darkness of the past is on me still. I cannot escape from it. Do you know why you are to enter tonight?"

"No," answered Fleta, a little surprised by the abrupt question. "It is the dawn of the year; the full moon of that dawn. It is the seventh year of seven years, the twenty-seventh of twenty-seven years. Do you know how old you are?" Fleta rose suddenly and walked away down the path without answering him.

And there, straight before her, stood Ivan. He immediately began to speak to her. There was something in his face which overawed and silenced her, something so strong and powerful that she stood trembling to await the exercise of this force which she recognised in him. "Amyot speaks well," said Ivan, "but it is not for you to listen to him. It is not you who can help him to enter among the initiates. You! How have you carried out your mission? After ages of degradation, in which you have sold your soul for magical powers, you are no stronger to help others than when first you came upon this earth, a savage and untaught creature. You are strong, Fleta; but, like Amyot, you are too strong. But he is a chosen one, and will remain guarded and cared for, because he desires no power for his own use, only power with which to help others. And you, who have had touch of the lofty order of the White Star, that Brotherhood which lives for humanity, you have carried yourself so imperiously that you have not chosen to do good - except by doing evil. Is it not so? Have you not, through innumerable lives, valued your power over Hilary Estanol so highly that you could not surrender it? Did you not give yourself beauty and charm in order that you might read love in his eyes? Weary as you were of him and of his weakness, did you not, still enchant him in order to feel the pleasure of his love for you? And that, too, long after it was possible for you to love any creature, when I had purified your soul utterly from passion. Oh, Fleta, this hunger for the exercise of power is indeed your destruction. Why did you not call on the White Brotherhood to save Otto, instead of endeavouring the task alone? You were driven back upon your old magical rites that you practised in the dark days when you and Etrenella worked together. Sorceress!

Witch! Do you think you helped Otto to his salvation? Do you think that in using such destructive and gross forms of power you could aid his divine spirit, or help to free it? Not so. Awake from these delusions. You are a woman still, and cannot escape from the love of power and the love of pleasure, those laws which govern the life of sex. You no longer love; but are you any better because you no longer love like other women? Not so; you have transferred the emotions of sex on to a higher plane, and have, therefore, sinned more deeply than if you had left them on the simple plane of ordinary human nature.

Because you are freed from the ordinary passions which affect men and women is it any better to desire to dominate, to charm, to fascinate, to control?

You, that have the divine possibility in you, the vigour and strength necessary for the occultist, is it possible that you are not yet aware of the mire in which you are still wandering? Rouse yourself; look to the divine consciousness; fix your attention on that vision of humanity which I have given to you; think of no person and of no persons, but of all; forget that you are a woman - with power to charm - forget that you are a magician with power to control. You know that sorcery is of the same order as the passion of sex; it is selfish, it desires to acquire, to intensify all that is personal. You know this, for you have learned it from me - you have known it for ages. Yet you have madly let yourself follow this passion in its nobler form, and refused to see that by merely elevating it you did not change its character. Hilary Estanol, from the cruel wound you inflicted on him when you flung him from you, will be able to learn the lesson you have failed yet to learn. He will not love, again; he will no longer desire to have or to hold. He is free. He has lived through the experiences of sex, the blossom has fallen. There is no more delusion for him, for you killed the possibility of it in his soul by your heartless acts. It is over. But he has found the fruit. His soul has dissolved within him; it is soft, utterly tender, capable of all unselfishness. When you least knew it you gave him his salvation. Now he can no longer suffer at your hands. The thralldom he fell under ages ago in that wild apricot orchard, when he first loved you, and you showed him the fierce power that you possessed - it is at an end. He has been your slave, tormented and maddened; but now he has escaped. He suffers like one in physical torture, so great is his despair; but he is opening his soul to the divine power, and he will, when he is born again to renew his efforts, find himself strong, calm, no longer passionate, no longer a man; a divine being, impartial, indifferent, unselfish, all-loving, ready for my service. And you? Amyot has told you that this is a day which is a date in your life. Today you must learn the truth, and cast the glamour from your eyes."

Fleta trembled, shuddered, and drew back a step. What glamour was there left to take from her? Had she anything left to lose? She uttered no word, for Ivan continued to speak:

"Did I not tell you that tonight you should enter the Hall of Learning? It is true; but only after you have fulfilled certain conditions. You will fulfil them, I know; for had you not contained the power to do this within you, you would long since have lost my aid and the protection of the White Star. At sundown this day, you have your chance; the dial there will show you the moment when you must seize it. When the moment of sundown comes you can enter the hall if you choose, and become a true pupil of the divine teachers.

But your spirit must be freed. I shall not help you to enter the hall; for you will never again see me - in the flesh or in the spirit. You must of your own free will give up my help and my guidance. You are a magician, and have the power, if you choose, to make a semblance of me which will supply my place. You must give up all delusions; you must root out your adoration for me from your heart and free me from it. I have to go on into another life, and you must willingly separate yourself from me utterly.

You must give up for ever your love of power, and swear solemnly within yourself that you will never use the powers you possess for your own ends again. You must do this willingly. Go over in your mind the many delusions to which you have allowed yourself to succumb. Consider this last and subtlest of all, in which you fancied yourself about to become my ally and servant in keeping these astral pathways ready for later humanity. The experience helped you towards the idea of impersonal work; and therefore I put you through it. But though your spirit was pure enough to resist that, counterfeit presentment of myself which bade you remember that in doing this work you would be doing this with me - though you resisted that, were you strong enough to drain every drop of the delicious poison from out of the chalice of your heart? Was there not the faint, fond feeling there that you would not be utterly alone? That even if you might not adore me, yet you might serve me? Root out these delusions utterly, Fleta. You have to forget you are a woman; more, you have to forget you are a person. Was not that dream that you must save two other souls, and take them with you into the hall, only another form of your passion for power? Who was it gave you that order? Was it not your own imperious soul? Did you not hope to pay for your entrance by giving earnest at the doorway of your power over others? Oh, Fleta, be honest with yourself. When I came to you, now, were you not on the threshold of another folly? Had not Amyot's sad words tempted you to believe that in him you might find one of these souls you had to save? Fond madness! Did it not thrill you with a sense of new glory, the fancy that you might carry to the hall one so great as Amyot? Be courageous, and face the fact that you are nothing in yourself, that you are only a fragment tossed on the tide of the great powers that sweep over the world. You are a part of these; yes, in your inner self, you are, and cannot be entirely separated or cast off from them. But you have kept yourself a fragment instead of a part of the whole.

Become that, dissolve your being in the infinite love, and it will be to you as death; but the re-awakening will be a new birth such as you have never known. For in it you will not be the strength of one poor human being, poor indeed, magician though you are, but the strength of the old consciousness that makes the worlds. Come, Fleta, to that divine estate! The dark power that made you a sorceress will make more keen and wild, when translated and transmuted, the divine power which will make you divine. Come! But forget yourself, forget your power. Be courageous. Are you ready? Are you willing to surrender me, your master and friend, and let me go free, without any longing or lingering thought, from you? Are you ready to be utterly alone, without human face or voice, either near you in the world, or present in the world of thought within you? Are you ready to put me out of your memory?"

Fleta stood, as she had stood ever since he began speaking, motionless, save for that one shudder of pain; gazing on him as if she were turned to stone. For a moment she remained thus, statue-like, and as if all her senses were paralysed, and she could neither speak nor move. But suddenly she seemed to regain power over herself; she flung out her hands with an imperative gesture. "I am ready," she said, "and your greater life is ready for you. I see it, shining gloriously. From those splendid heights of thought and feeling, from that noble place of self-sacrifice, it would be hard indeed for you to touch one so mistaken, so deeply stained as I am. Your pupil shall not fail, my master, mine no longer.

I will forget you. I will detach every thought and memory from you. I am ready. Go!" He turned and walked away down the path. Fleta watched him till he was out of sight. Then she turned and looked for Amyot; but he, too, was gone. She was alone, before the sea and sky. Then she remembered the sundial and went to look for it. It was a long search, for an old rose-bush had clambered all over it and she had to tear the branches away with her hands. She fell on her knees beside it and there remained through the silent hours of the sunny afternoon.

Alone. At first that one word filled the whole horizon of her thought. She could not escape from it; she could not remove the ghastly consciousness from her vision.

When intense physical pain continues without intermission, the sufferer begins to battle against it, and succeeds at last, when no other remedy is possible, in retreating to another place of consciousness where the pain becomes tolerable, and then to a place where it suddenly transforms itself into pleasure. This is the whole secret of that mystery spoken of by occultists, that pleasure and pain are the same. It is so, for both are sensation, and there is no true means of discrimination between the kinds of sensation. What is pleasure to one person is pain to another. Had Fleta been a magician at heart and nothing more, this solitude, this utter loneliness, would have wrapped her round with comfort as a garment might. It would have given her opportunity for personal thought, for plotting and scheming. But she was not that; she was only a magician, because of her innate power and the blindness of her ignorance. Her heart was tender now, full of love; but she knew not how, with this love in her, to forget her utter loneliness.

Yet it must be forgotten. She succeeded in changing her attitude towards it, in retreating from the agony and making it only sensation, which it was possible to regard as pleasure. At last it became pleasure. But she knew it had to be more than this. It had to be nothing!

It came at last, suddenly, this unconsciousness. The fact that she was alone - that everything and everyone had fallen away from her, was nothing. And why - because she was nothing.

And then a new vigour flashed into her being. Something so strong it was, as though light ran through her veins instead of blood. Something so pure, it blotted out all memory of self. She rose to her feet. "Of all that lives, I live."

Her voice rang out on the air and startled herself. it seemed unrecognisable, it was so bell-like. She looked down, and her glance fell on the dial. It was sundown.

For a second, which seemed like a superb eternity, she stood quite still, her mind, her soul, her being, bathed in an unconsciousness which was more vivid than any consciousness. And then she fell forward, her face upon the earth, beside the rose-bush, among the flowers.

Epilogue

Two months later the agent visited the now-deserted Dower House, and then the castle. He found the door of the haunted room standing open for the first time in his experience. He looked in timidly, and saw nothing but a few autumn leaves, seemingly blown by the wind about the bare floor. Shuddering, he closed the door and went away.

Some wayward impulse prompted him, before leaving the castle grounds, to go down to the Lady's Walk and look at the sea. But he did not look at it, for the moment he entered the Walk he saw a figure lying among the flowers, and his whole attention was given to that. A woman - motionless, richly dressed, and with beautiful hair, which had fallen loose and lay beside her on the earth. What could it mean? Nerving himself, he approached and touched her. Instantly he knew she was dead, and, with a shudder of dread, turned the face upwards. Ah, what a sight! None could tell this had been a human face save by the bones. Where was Fleta's beauty now? Where was Fleta?

THE END.

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