

No Name

By

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Preface .....	4
Chapter I.1 .....	6
Chapter I.2 .....	22
Chapter I.3 .....	29
Chapter I.4 .....	35
Chapter I.5 .....	48
Chapter I.6 .....	57
Chapter I.7 .....	69
Chapter I.8 .....	75
Chapter I.9 .....	84
Chapter I.10 .....	99
Chapter I.11 .....	112
Chapter I.12 .....	122
Chapter I.13 .....	133
Chapter I.14 .....	150
Chapter I.15 .....	159
Between The Scenes .....	182
Chapter II.1 .....	197
Chapter II.2 .....	215
Chapter II.3 .....	232
Between The Scenes .....	251
Chapter III.1 .....	274
Chapter III.2 .....	282
Chapter III.3 .....	297
Chapter III.4 .....	313
Between The Scenes .....	327
Chapter IV.2 .....	364

Chapter IV.3 .....	372
Chapter IV.4 .....	381
Chapter IV.5 .....	396
Chapter IV.6 .....	414
Chapter IV.7 .....	431
Chapter IV.8 .....	448
Chapter IV.9 .....	463
Chapter IV.10 .....	480
Chapter IV.11 .....	495
Chapter IV.12 .....	507
Chapter IV.13 .....	512
Chapter IV.14 .....	534
Between The Scenes .....	550
Chapter V.1 .....	571
Chapter V.2 .....	587
Chapter V.3 .....	605
Between The Scenes .....	625
Chapter VI.1 .....	640
Chapter VI.2 .....	650
Between The Scenes .....	659
Chapter VII.1 .....	663
Chapter VII.2 .....	679
Chapter VII.3 .....	687
Chapter VII.4 .....	699
Between The Scenes .....	727
Chapter VIII.1 .....	743
Chapter VIII.2 .....	756
Chapter VIII.3 .....	772
Chapter VIII.4 .....	782

## Preface

THE main purpose of this story is to appeal to the reader's interest in a subject which has been the theme of some of the greatest writers, living and dead -- but which has never been, and can never be, exhausted, because it is a subject eternally interesting to all mankind. Here is one more book that depicts the struggle of a human creature, under those opposing influences of Good and Evil, which we have all felt, which we have all known. It has been my aim to make the character of "Magdalen," which personifies this struggle, a pathetic character even in its perversity and its error; and I have tried hard to attain this result by the least obtrusive and the least artificial of all means -- by a resolute adherence throughout to the truth as it is in Nature. This design was no easy one to accomplish; and it has been a great encouragement to me (during the publication of my story in its periodical form) to know, on the authority of many readers, that the object which I had proposed to myself, I might, in some degree, consider as an object achieved.

Round the central figure in the narrative other characters will be found grouped, in sharp contrast -- contrast, for the most part, in which I have endeavored to make the element of humor mainly predominant. I have sought to impart this relief to the more serious passages in the book, not only because I believe myself to be justified in doing so by the laws of Art -- but because experience has taught me (what the experience of my readers will doubtless confirm) that there is no such moral phenomenon as unmixed tragedy to be found in the world around us. Look where we may, the dark threads and the light cross each other perpetually in the texture of human life.

To pass from the Characters to the Story, it will be seen that the narrative related in these pages has been constructed on a plan which differs from the plan followed in my last novel, and in some other of my works published at an earlier date. The only Secret contained in this book is revealed midway in the first volume. From that point, all the main events of the story are purposely

foreshadowed before they take place -- my present design being to rouse the reader's interest in following the train of circumstances by which these foreseen events are brought about. In trying this new ground, I am not turning my back in doubt on the ground which I have passed over already. My one object in following a new course is to enlarge the range of my studies in the art of writing fiction, and to vary the form in which I make my appeal to the reader, as attractively as I can.

There is no need for me to add more to these few prefatory words than is here written. What I might otherwise have wished to say in this place, I have endeavored to make the book itself say for me.

TO

FRANCIS CARR BEARD

(FELLOW OF THE ROYAL COLLEGE OF SURGEONS OF ENGLAND),

IN REMEMBRANCE OF THE TIME WHEN

THE CLOSING SCENES OF THIS STORY WERE WRITTEN.

NO NAME.

THE FIRST SCENE.

COMBE-RAVEN, SOMERSETSHIRE.

## Chapter I.1

THE hands on the hall-clock pointed to half-past six in the morning. The house was a country residence in West Somersetshire, called Combe-Raven. The day was the fourth of March, and the year was eighteen hundred and forty-six.

No sounds but the steady ticking of the clock, and the lumpish snoring of a large dog stretched on a mat outside the dining-room door, disturbed the mysterious morning stillness of hall and staircase. Who were the sleepers hidden in the upper regions? Let the house reveal its own secrets; and, one by one, as they descend the stairs from their beds, let the sleepers disclose themselves.

As the clock pointed to a quarter to seven, the dog woke and shook himself. After waiting in vain for the footman, who was accustomed to let him out, the animal wandered restlessly from one closed door to another on the ground-floor; and, returning to his mat in great perplexity, appealed to the sleeping family with a long and melancholy howl.

Before the last notes of the dog's remonstrance had died away, the oaken stairs in the higher regions of the house creaked under slowly-descending footsteps. In a minute more the first of the female servants made her appearance, with a dingy woolen shawl over her shoulders -- for the March morning was bleak; and rheumatism and the cook were old acquaintances.

Receiving the dog's first cordial advances with the worst possible grace, the cook slowly opened the hall door and let the animal out. It was a wild morning. Over a spacious lawn, and behind a black plantation of firs, the rising sun rent its way upward through piles of ragged gray cloud; heavy drops of rain fell few and far between; the March wind shuddered round the corners of the house, and the wet trees swayed wearily.

Seven o'clock struck; and the signs of domestic life began to show themselves in more rapid succession.

The housemaid came down -- tall and slim, with the state of the spring temperature written redly on her nose. The lady's-maid followed -- young, smart, plump, and sleepy. The kitchen-maid came next -- afflicted with the face-ache, and making no secret of her sufferings. Last of all, the footman appeared, yawning disconsolately; the living picture of a man who felt that he had been defrauded of his fair night's rest.

The conversation of the servants, when they assembled before the slowly lighting kitchen fire, referred to a recent family event, and turned at starting on this question: Had Thomas, the footman, seen anything of the concert at Clifton, at which his master and the two young ladies had been present on the previous night? Yes; Thomas had heard the concert; he had been paid for to go in at the back; it was a loud concert; it was a hot concert; it was described at the top of the bills as Grand; whether it was worth traveling sixteen miles to hear by railway, with the additional hardship of going back nineteen miles by road, at half-past one in the morning -- was a question which he would leave his master and the young ladies to decide; his own opinion, in the meantime, being unhesitatingly, No. Further inquiries, on the part of all the female servants in succession, elicited no additional information of any sort. Thomas could hum none of the songs, and could describe none of the ladies' dresses. His audience, accordingly, gave him up in despair; and the kitchen small-talk flowed back into its ordinary channels, until the clock struck eight and startled the assembled servants into separating for their morning's work.

A quarter past eight, and nothing happened. Half-past -- and more signs of life appeared from the bedroom regions. The next member of the family who came downstairs was Mr. Andrew Vanstone, the master of the house.

Tall, stout, and upright -- with bright blue eyes, and healthy, florid complexion -- his brown plush shooting-jacket carelessly buttoned awry; his vixenish little

Scotch terrier barking unrebuked at his heels; one hand thrust into his waistcoat pocket, and the other smacking the banisters cheerfully as he came downstairs humming a tune -- Mr. Vanstone showed his character on the surface of him freely to all men. An easy, hearty, handsome, good-humored gentleman, who walked on the sunny side of the way of life, and who asked nothing better than to meet all his fellow-passengers in this world on the sunny side, too. Estimating him by years, he had turned fifty. Judging him by lightness of heart, strength of constitution, and capacity for enjoyment, he was no older than most men who have only turned thirty.

"Thomas!" cried Mr. Vanstone, taking up his old felt hat and his thick walking stick from the hall table. "Breakfast, this morning, at ten. The young ladies are not likely to be down earlier after the concert last night. -- By-the-by, how did you like the concert yourself, eh? You thought it was grand? Quite right; so it was. Nothing but crash-bang, varied now and then by bang-crash; all the women dressed within an inch of their lives; smothering heat, blazing gas, and no room for anybody -- yes, yes, Thomas; grand's the word for it, and comfortable isn't." With that expression of opinion, Mr. Vanstone whistled to his vixenish terrier; flourished his stick at the hall door in cheerful defiance of the rain; and set off through wind and weather for his morning walk.

The hands, stealing their steady way round the dial of the clock, pointed to ten minutes to nine. Another member of the family appeared on the stairs -- Miss Garth, the governess.

No observant eyes could have surveyed Miss Garth without seeing at once that she was a north-countrywoman. Her hard featured face; her masculine readiness and decision of movement; her obstinate honesty of look and manner, all proclaimed her border birth and border training. Though little more than forty years of age, her hair was quite gray; and she wore over it the plain cap of an old woman. Neither hair nor head-dress was out of harmony with her face -- it looked older than her years: the hard handwriting of trouble had scored it heavily at some past time. The self-possession of her progress downstairs, and the air of

habitual authority with which she looked about her, spoke well for her position in Mr. Vanstone's family. This was evidently not one of the forlorn, persecuted, pitiably dependent order of governesses. Here was a woman who lived on ascertained and honorable terms with her employers -- a woman who looked capable of sending any parents in England to the right-about, if they failed to rate her at her proper value.

"Breakfast at ten?" repeated Miss Garth, when the footman had answered the bell, and had mentioned his master's orders. "Ha! I thought what would come of that concert last night. When people who live in the country patronize public amusements, public amusements return the compliment by upsetting the family afterward for days together. You're upset, Thomas, I can see -- your eyes are as red as a ferret's, and your cravat looks as if you had slept in it. Bring the kettle at a quarter to ten -- and if you don't get better in the course of the day, come to me, and I'll give you a dose of physic. That's a well-meaning lad, if you only let him alone," continued Miss Garth, in soliloquy, when Thomas had retired; "but he's not strong enough for concerts twenty miles off. They wanted me to go with them last night. Yes: catch me!"

Nine o'clock struck; and the minute-hand stole on to twenty minutes past the hour, before any more footsteps were heard on the stairs. At the end of that time, two ladies appeared, descending to the breakfast-room together -- Mrs. Vanstone and her eldest daughter.

If the personal attractions of Mrs. Vanstone, at an earlier period of life, had depended solely on her native English charms of complexion and freshness, she must have long since lost the last relics of her fairer self. But her beauty as a young woman had passed beyond the average national limits; and she still preserved the advantage of her more exceptional personal gifts. Although she was now in her forty-fourth year; although she had been tried, in bygone times, by the premature loss of more than one of her children, and by long attacks of illness which had followed those bereavements of former years -- she still preserved the fair proportion and subtle delicacy of feature, once associated with

the all-adorning brightness and freshness of beauty, which had left her never to return. Her eldest child, now descending the stairs by her side, was the mirror in which she could look back and see again the reflection of her own youth. There, folded thick on the daughter's head, lay the massive dark hair, which, on the mother's, was fast turning gray. There, in the daughter's cheek, glowed the lovely dusky red which had faded from the mother's to bloom again no more. Miss Vanstone had already reached the first maturity of womanhood; she had completed her six-and-twentieth year. Inheriting the dark majestic character of her mother's beauty, she had yet hardly inherited all its charms. Though the shape of her face was the same, the features were scarcely so delicate, their proportion was scarcely so true. She was not so tall. She had the dark-brown eyes of her mother -- full and soft, with the steady luster in them which Mrs. Vanstone's eyes had lost -- and yet there was less interest, less refinement and depth of feeling in her expression: it was gentle and feminine, but clouded by a certain quiet reserve, from which her mother's face was free. If we dare to look closely enough, may we not observe that the moral force of character and the higher intellectual capacities in parents seem often to wear out mysteriously in the course of transmission to children? In these days of insidious nervous exhaustion and subtly-spreading nervous malady, is it not possible that the same rule may apply, less rarely than we are willing to admit, to the bodily gifts as well?

The mother and daughter slowly descended the stairs together -- the first dressed in dark brown, with an Indian shawl thrown over her shoulders; the second more simply attired in black, with a plain collar and cuffs, and a dark orange-colored ribbon over the bosom of her dress. As they crossed the hall and entered the breakfast-room, Miss Vanstone was full of the all-absorbing subject of the last night's concert.

"I am so sorry, mamma, you were not with us," she said. "You have been so strong and so well ever since last summer -- you have felt so many years younger, as you said yourself -- that I am sure the exertion would not have been too much for you."

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