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Chapter 10 - Juliet Gains Experience

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"Of course," Juliet said, "after Tredowen it seems very small, almost poky, but it isn't, really, and Tredowen was not for me all my days. It was quite time I got used to something else."

Wingrave looked around him with expressionless face. It was a tiny room, high up on the fifth floor of a block of flats, prettily but inexpensively furnished. Juliet herself, tall and slim, with all the fire of youth and perfect health on her young face, was obviously contented.

"And your work?" he asked.

She made a little grimace.

"I have a good deal to unlearn," she said, "but Mr. Pleydell is very kind and encouraging."

"You will go down to Cornwall for the hot weather, I hope?" he said. "London is unbearable in August."

"The class are going for a sketching tour to Normandy," she said, "and Mr. Pleydell thought that I might like to join them. It is very inexpensive, and I should be able to go on with my work all the time."

He nodded thoughtfully.

"I hear," he said, "that you have met Mr. Aynsworth again."

"Wasn't it delightful?" she exclaimed. "He is quite an old friend of Mr. Pleydell. I was so glad to see him."

"I suppose," he remarked, "you are a little lonely sometimes?"

"Sometimes," she admitted. "But I sha'n't be when I get to know the girls in the class a little better."

"I have some friends," he said thoughtfully, "women, of course, who would come and see you with pleasure. And yet," he added, "I am not sure that you would not be better off without knowing them."

"They are fashionable ladies, perhaps?" she said simply.

He nodded.

"They belong to the Juggernaut here which is called society. They would probably try to draw you a little way into its meshes. I think, yes, I am sure," he added, looking at her, "that you are better off outside."

"And I am quite sure of it," she answered laughing. "I haven't the clothes or the time or the inclination for that sort of thing. Besides, I am going to be much too happy ever to be lonely."

"I myself," he said, "am not an impressionable person. But they tell me that most people, especially of your age, find London a terribly lonely place."

"I can understand that," she answered, "unless they really had something definite to do. I have felt a little of that myself. I think London frightens me a little. It is so different from the country, and there is a great deal that is difficult to understand."

"For instance?"

"The great number of poor people who find it so hard to live," she answered. "Some of the small houses round here are awful, and Mr. Malcolm--he is the vicar of the church here, and he called yesterday--tells me that they are nothing like so bad as in some other parts of London. And then you take a bus, it is such a short distance--and the shops are full of wonderful things at such fabulous prices, and the carriages and houses are so lovely, and people seem to be showering money right and left everywhere."

"It is the same in all large cities," he answered, "more or less. There must always be rich and poor, when a great community are herded together. As a rule, the extreme poor are a worthless lot."

"There must be some of them, though," she answered, "who deserve to have a better time. Of course, I have never been outside Tredowen, where everyone was contented and happy in their way, and it seems terrible to me just at first. I can't bear to think that everyone hasn't at least a chance of happiness."

"You are too young," he said, "to bother your head about these things yet. Wait until you have gathered in a little philosophy with the years. Then you will understand how helpless you are to alter by ever so little the existing state of things, and it will trouble you less."

"I," she answered, "may, of course, be helpless, but what about those people who have huge fortunes, and still do nothing?"

"Why should they?" he answered coldly. "This is a world for individual effort. No man is strong enough to carry even a single one of his fellows upon his shoulders. Charity is the most illogical and pernicious of all weaknesses."

"Now you are laughing at me," she declared. "I mean men like that Mr. Wingrave, the American who has come to England to spend all his millions. I have just been reading about him," she added, pointing to an illustrated paper on the table. "They say that his income is too vast to be put into figures which would sound reasonable; that he has estates and shooting properties, and a yacht which he has never yet even seen. And yet he will not give one penny away. He gives nothing to the hospitals, nothing to the poor. He spends his money on himself, and himself alone!"

Wingrave smiled grimly.

"I am not prepared to defend my namesake," he said; "but every man has a right to do what he likes with his own, hasn't he? And as for hospitals, Mr. Wingrave probably thinks, like a good many more, that they should be state endowed. People could make use of them, then, without loss of self respect."

She shook her head a little doubtfully.

"I can't argue about it yet," she said, "because I haven't thought about it long enough. But I know if I had all the money this man has, I couldn't be happy to spend thousands and thousands upon myself while there were people almost starving in the same city."

"You are a sentimentalist, you see," he remarked, "and you have not studied the laws on which society is based. Tell me, how does Mrs. Tresfarwin like London?"

Juliet laughed merrily.

"Isn't it amusing?" she declared. "She loves it! She grumbles at the milk, and we have the butter from Tredowen. Everything else she finds perfection. She doesn't even mind the five flights of stone steps."

"Social problems," Wingrave remarked, "do not trouble her."

"Not in the least," Juliet declared. "She spends all her pennies on beggars and omnibus rides, and she is perfectly happy."

Wingrave rose to go in a few minutes. Juliet walked with him to the door.

"I am going to be really hospitable," she declared. "I am going to walk with you to the street."

"All down those five flights?" he exclaimed.

"Every one of them!"

They commenced the descent.

"There is something about a flat," she declared, "which makes one horribly curious about one's neighbors--especially if one has never had any. All these closed doors may hide no end of interesting people, and I have never seen a soul go in or out. How did you like all this climbing?"

"I'm afraid I didn't appreciate it," he admitted.

"Perhaps you won't come to see me again, then?" she asked. "I hope you will."

"I will come," he said a little stiffly, "with pleasure!"

They were on the ground floor, and Juliet opened the door. Wingrave's motor was outside, and the man touched his hat. She gave a little breathless cry.

"It isn't yours?" she exclaimed.

"Certainly," he answered. "Do you want to come and look at it?"

"Rather!" she exclaimed. "I have never seen one close to in my life."

He hesitated.

"I'll take you a little way, if you like," he said.

Her cheeks were pink with excitement.

"If I like! And I've never been in one before! I'll fly up for my hat. I sha'n't be a moment."

She was already halfway up the first flight of stairs, with a whirl of skirts and flying feet. Wingrave lit a cigarette and stood for a moment thoughtfully upon the pavement. Then he shrugged his shoulders. His face had grown a little harder.

"She must take her chances," he muttered. "No one knows her. Nobody is likely to find out who she is."

She was down again in less time than seemed possible. Her cheeks were flushed and her eyes bright with excitement. Wingrave took the wheel himself, and she sat up by his side. They glided off almost noiselessly.

"We will go up to the Park," he said. "It is just the time to see the people."

"Anywhere!" she exclaimed. "This is too lovely!"

They passed from Battersea northwards into Piccadilly, and down into the Park. Juliet was too excited to talk; Wingrave had enough to do to drive the car. They passed

plenty of people who bowed, and many who glanced with wondering admiration at the beautiful girl who sat by Wingrave's side. Lady Ruth, who drive by quickly in a barouche, almost rose from her seat; the Marchioness, whose victoria they passed, had time to wave her hand and flash a quick, searching glance at Juliet, who returned it with her dark eyes filled with admiration. The Marchioness smiled to herself a little sadly as the car shot away ahead.

"If one asked," she murmured to herself, "he would try to persuade one that it was another victim."