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MUMMERY

A TALE OF THREE IDEALISTS

BY

GILBERT CANNAN

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GLASGOW — MELBOURNE — AUCKLAND

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

NOVELS

PETER HOMUNCULUS
LITTLE BROTHER
ROUND THE CORNER
OLD MOLE
YOUNG EARNEST
THREE PRETTY MEN
MENDEL

THE STUCCO HOUSE
PINK ROSES

FOUR PLAYS
EVERYBODY'S HUSBAND

WINDMILLS
SATIRE
THE JOY OF THE THEATRE
FREEDOM
THE ANATOMY OF SOCIETY
NOEL
POEMS

TO ARIEL

AMY GWEN WILSON

Shakespeare dreamed you, Ariel,
  In a poet's ecstasy.
I have loved and dare not tell
  Of your being's mystery.

Ariel, from Shakespeare's dream
  Flown into my love on earth,
You shall help me to redeem
  Love and truth denied their birth.

In a world by Caliban
  Brutalised and done to death,
We will weave a spell that Man
  May in freedom draw his breath.

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I

A DESCENT ON LONDON

On a day in August, in one of those swiftly-moving years which hurried Europe towards the catastrophe awaiting it, there arrived in London a couple of unusual appearance, striking, charming, and amusing. The man was tall, big, and queerly compounded of sensitive beauty and stodgy awkwardness. He entered London with an air of hostility; sniffed distastefully the smells of the station, peered in distress through the murky light, and clearly by his personality and his exploitation of it in his dress challenged the uniformity of the great city which was his home. His dress was peculiar: an enormous black hat above a shock of wispy fair hair, an ill-cut black coat, a cloak flung back over his shoulders, a very high starched collar, abominable trousers, and long, pointed French boots.

'But they have rebuilt the station!' he said, in a loud voice of almost peevish disapproval.

'I remember reading about it, Carlo,' replied his companion. 'It fell down and destroyed a theatre.'

'A bad omen,' said Charles Mann, 'I wish we had arrived at another station.'

'I don't think it matters,' smiled Clara Day.

'I say it does,' snapped he. 'It is a mean little station. A London station should be grand and spacious, the magnificent ante-room to a royal city. I must get them to let me design a station.'

'They don't often fall down,' said Clara. 'I wish you would see to the luggage.'

All the other passengers, French and English, had collected their baggage and had hurried away, but Charles Mann was never in a hurry, and he stayed scowling at the station which London had had the effrontery to erect in his absence.

'In Germany and Russia,' he muttered, 'they understand that stations are very important.'

'Do look after the luggage,' urged Clara, and very reluctantly Charles Mann strolled along the platform, leaving his companion to the admiration of the passengers arriving for the next out-going train. She deserved it, for she was extremely handsome, almost pathetically young for the knowledge written in her eyes and on her lips, and the charming dress of purple and old red designed for her slim figure by Charles drew the curious and rather scandalised eyes of the women. It was in no fashion, but the perfection of its individuality raised it above that tyranny, just as Clara's personality, in its compact force, and delicious free movement, raised her above the conventionalism which makes woman mere reflections of each other. When she moved, her clothes were liquid with her vitality. When she stood still, they were as monumental as herself. She and they were one.

She was happy. It had taken her nearly two years to bring Charles back to London, where, as an Englishman, and, as she knew, one of the most gifted Englishmen of his time, his work lay, and she felt certain that here, in London, among other artists, it would be possible to extricate him from his own thoughts, which abroad kept him blissfully happy but prevented his doing work which was intelligible to any one else.

He was rather a long time over the luggage, and at last she ran along the platform to find him lost in contemplation.

'Have you decided where we are going to?' she asked.

'Eh?'

'Have you decided where we are going to?'

'I must get a secretary,' he replied, and Clara laughed. 'But I must,' he went on. 'It is absolutely necessary for me to have a secretary. I can do nothing without one.... He shall be a good man, and he shall be paid four hundred a year.'

Clara approached a porter and told him to take their luggage to the hotel.

'We can stay there while we look about us,' she said. She had learned that when Charles talked about money it was best to ignore him. She took cheap rooms at the top of the hotel, with a view out over the river to the Surrey hills, and there until three o'clock in the morning Charles smoked cigars and talked, as only he could talk, of art and Italy and Paris—which they had left without paying their rent—and the delights and abominations of London.

'I feel satisfied now that you were right,' he said. 'Here we are in London and I shall begin to do my real work. I shall have a secretary and an advertising agent, and I shall talk to London in the language it understands.... Paris knows me, Munich knows me, St Petersburg knows me; London shall know me. There are artists in London. All they want is a lead.'

Clara went to bed and lay for a long time with erratic memories streaming through her brain —days in the hills in Italy, nights of hunger in Paris, the cross-eyed man who stared so hard at her on the boat, the dismal port at Calais, the more dismal landing at Dover, the detached existence of her three years with Charles, whose astonishing vitality kindled and continually disappointed her hope.... And then queer, ugly memories of her own wandering, homeless childhood with her grandfather, who had died in Paris, leaving her the little money he had, so that she had stayed among the artists in Paris, had been numbed and dazed by them, until Charles took possession of her exactly as he did of stray cats and dogs and birds in cages.

'This is London,' she said, 'and I am twenty-one.' So she, too, approached London in a spirit of challenging hostility, determined if, as she believed, there was nothing a woman could not do, that London should acknowledge Charles as the genius of which he so constantly remarked it stood in need.

In the morning she was up betimes, and stood at the window looking out over the sprawl of the south side of the river to the dome of Bedlam and the tower of Southwark Cathedral, the clustered chimneys, and the gray litter of untidy, huddled roofs.

'That is not London,' said Charles from the bed, as she cried ecstatically. 'London is a very small circle, the centre of which is to the cultivated the National Gallery, and to the vulgar Piccadilly Circus.... Piccadilly Circus we can ignore. What we have to do is to stand on the dome of the National Gallery and sing our gospel. Then if we can make the cultured hear us, we shall have the vulgar gaping and opening their pockets.'

'I don't want you to be applauded by people who can't appreciate you,' said Clara.

'No?' grumbled Charles. 'Well, I'm going to have bath and breakfast and then I shall astonish you.'

'You always do that,' cried Clara. 'Darling Charles!'

She rang the bell, and sat on the bed, and in a few minutes they were enjoying their continental breakfast of coffee, rolls, and honey.

'I sometimes feel,' said Charles, 'that I have merely taken the place of your grandfather.... You are the only creature I have ever met who is younger than myself. That is why you can do as you like with me.... But you can't make me grow a beard.'

'I wish you would.'

'And then I should be like your grandfather?'

'No. You would be more like you.'

'You adorable child,' he said. 'You would reform me out of existence if you had your way.'

Charles got up, had his bath, shaved, and went out, leaving Clara to unpack and make out a list of clothes that he required before she could consider him fit to go out into that London whose centre is the National Gallery.

As he did not return for lunch, she set out alone to explore the region which he designed to conquer. She wandered in a dream of delight, first of all through the galleries and then through the streets, as far as Westminster on the one side, and as Oxford Street on the other, and fixed in her mind the location of every one of the theatres. She was especially interested in the women, and was both hurt and pleased by the dislike and suspicion with which they regarded her originality.... Every now and then she saw a face which made her want to go up to its owner and say: 'I'm Clara Day; I've just come to London,' but she forebore; and when people smiled at her, as many did, she returned their smile, and hurried on in her eagerness to explore and to understand the kingdom which was to be Charles Mann's—a kingdom, like others, of splendour and misery, but overwhelmingly rich with its huge hotels, great blocks of offices, vast theatres and music-halls, enormous shops full of merchandise of the finest quality; jewels, clothes, furs, napery, silver, cutlery; its monuments, its dense traffic; its flower-sellers and innumerable newsvendors; its glimpses through the high-walled streets of green trees, its dominating towers; its lounging men and women. Jews, with gold chains and diamond rings, Americans with large cigars and padded shoulders, painted women, niggers, policemen, match-sellers, boot-blacks; its huge coloured advertisements; its sudden holes, leading to regions underground; its sluggish, rich self-satisfaction.... It overawed Clara a little, and as she sped along she whispered to herself, 'This is me in London.'

On her way back to the hotel she bought a paper, and, on opening it, found that it contained an interview with Mr Charles Mann on his return to London, an announcement that a dinner was to be given in his honour, and that he intended to hold an exhibition; and then Charles's views on many subjects were set out at some length, and he had thrown out a suggestion that a committee of artists should be formed to supervise the regeneration of London and to defeat the Americanisation which threatened it.

Clara hurried back to the hotel and found Charles in a great state of excitement, talking to a

thin, weedy little man whom he introduced as Mr Clott—his secretary.

'It has begun, child,' said Charles. 'Have you seen the papers? Things move quickly nowadays.... This evening I shall be very busy.'

'But you mustn't do anything without me,' Clara protested. 'You promised you wouldn't. You are sure to make a mess of it.'

'Clott,' said Charles magnificently, 'please send a copy of the letter I have dictated to the Press Association.'

'At once,' replied Mr Clott, with the alacrity of a man in a new job, and he darted from the room.

'He's a fool,' said Clara angrily, 'a perfect fool.'

'Of course he is,' answered Charles, 'or he would not be a secretary. He has undertaken that by the end of this week we shall be in a comfortable furnished house.'

'But who is to pay for it?'

'There is plenty of money in the world,' said Charles, who was so pleased with himself that Clara had not the heart to pursue the argument any further. 'London,' he continued, 'is a great talking shop. At present they haven't anything much to discuss so they shall talk about me.'

For a moment Clara felt that he had become as external to her as the people in the streets of the kingdom he designed to conquer, but she recollected that whenever he was at work he always was abstracted from her and entirely absorbed in what he was doing, only, however, to return like a giant refreshed to enter into her world again and make it more delightful than before. He was absorbed now, and she thought with a queer pang of alarm of the women with their dull, suspicious eyes, and, without realising the connection between what she thought and what she said, she broke into his absorption with,—

'Carlo, dear, I shall have to marry you.'

He spun round as though he had been stung and asked,—

'Good God, why?'

And again her answer was strange and came from some remote recess of her being,—

'London is different.'

Now Charles Mann was one of those sensitive people who yield at once to the will of another when it is precise and purposeful; and when in this girl, whom he had collected as he collected drunkards, cats, dogs, and other helpless creatures, such a will moved, though it cut like hot iron through his soul, he obeyed it without argument. He, whose faith in himself was scattered and dissipated, had in her a faith as whole as that of a child who accepts without a murmur a whipping from his father.

'My dear girl——' he murmured.

'You know you will have to,' she said firmly.

He looked uncomfortable. His large face was suddenly ashen and yellow, and a certain weakness crept into his ordinarily firm lips and nostrils. The girl's eyes were blazing at him, searching him, making him feel transparent, and so uncomfortable that he could do nothing but obey to relieve his own acute distress.

'Yes, of course.'

'Don't you want to?'

'Yes, of course.'

'It doesn't make any difference to us inside ourselves.'

'No. Of course not.'

What he wanted to say was, 'You're pinning me down. I'm not used to being pinned down. No one has ever pinned me down before.'

But he could not say it. He could only agree that it would be a good thing if they married, because London was different.

'At once?' he asked.

'At once,' said she.

He rang the bell, asked for Mr Clott, and when that gentleman appeared, ordered him to procure a special licence without delay. Mr Clott made a note of it in his little red book, tucked his pencil behind his ear, and trotted away, his narrow little back stiffened by elation. He, a gentleman of the Automobile Club, for whom there was no life outside the narrow circle whose centre is Piccadilly Circus, had been uneasy in his mind about the young lady, who was so clearly neither married nor purchasable, and it was a relief to him that she was to be his new employer's wife, though he was afraid of her, and shrivelled to the marrow in her presence.

II

THE DWELLERS IN ENCHANTMENT

'*Ça marche*,' said Charles Mann to his wife a few weeks later.

His programme was maturing. He had arranged for two books to be published, for an exhibition to be held, for a committee to be formed, for lectures to be delivered in provincial centres, and he had been insulted by an offer to play a part in a forthcoming production of *King Lear* at the Imperium Theatre. He had forgotten that he had ever been an actor and did not wish to be reminded of it, and he was incensed when the manager of the Imperium used the offer as an advertising paragraph.

'The fellow is jealous of the attention I am receiving in the Press and wants to divert some of it to himself.'

'You should go and see him,' suggested Clara.

'It is his place to come and see me.'

'No. Go and see him.'

'Are you right?'

'I always am.'

'Clott, take down this letter to Sir Henry Butcher, Imperium Theatre, S.W.... "Dear Sir Henry, When I declined your kind offer the other day, my refusal was as private as your suggestion. I can only conclude that some mistake has been made and I should like to have an understanding with you before I write a letter of explanation to the Press...."'

'You think too much of the Press, Carlo.'

'Only now, darling.... Later on the Press will have to come to me.'

Clara looked dubious.

'You're moving too quickly,' she said. 'I'm getting more used to London now, and I'm afraid of it. It is just a great big machine, and there's no control over it. There are times when I want to take you away from it.'

'You gave me no peace until we came here.'

'Yes. But I didn't want to begin at the top. I wanted to come over and live as we lived in Paris.'

'Impossible. What is freedom in Paris is poverty in London.'

'But all your time goes in writing to the papers and sitting on committees. You aren't doing any work.'

'I've worked in exile for ten years. I can carry on with that for a year at least.'

'Very well. Only don't stop believing in yourself.'

'I could never do that.'

'I think it would be very easy for you to begin believing in what the papers said about you.'

'You're too young, my dear. You see things too clearly.'

They were now in the furnished house found for them by Mr Clott, a most respectable house in an unimpeachable neighbourhood: an old house reclaimed from the slums, re-faced, re-panelled, painted, papered, decorated by a firm who supplied taste as well as furniture. Charles

hated it, but Clara, who through her grandfather knew and appreciated comfort, was delighted with it, and with a few deft touches in every room made it her own. It hurt her that Charles should hate it because it was good and decent in its atmosphere, and belonged to the widow of a famous man of letters, who, intrigued by the remarkable couple, had called once or twice and had invited Clara to her house, where the foreign-bred girl for the first time encountered the muffins and tea element of London life, which is its best and most characteristic. It seemed to her that, if Charles would not accept that, he would never be reconciled to his native country as she wanted him to be. There was about the muffins and tea in a cosy drawing-room a serenity which had always been to her the distinguishing mark of Englishmen abroad. It had been in her grandfather's character, and she wanted it to be in Charles's. It was to a certain extent in his character through his art, but she wanted it also to be through more tangible things. As she wanted it, she willed it, and her will was an impersonal thing which in its movement dragged her whole being with it, and it had no more consideration for others than it had for herself. She could see no reason why an artist should not be in touch with what was best in the ordinary lives of ordinary people; indeed, she could not imagine from what other source he could draw sustenance....

Friends and acquaintances had come quickly. Success was so rapid as to be almost ridiculous, and hardly worth having, and people took everything that Charles said in a most maddeningly literal way. She understood what he meant, but very often she found that his utterances were translated into terms of money or politics or the commercial theatre, where they became just nonsense. He was being transformed from her Charles into a monstrous London Charles, a great artist whose greatness was of more importance than his art.

She first took alarm at this on the occasion of the dinner which the dear, delightful fellow arranged to have given to himself and then with childlike innocence accepted as a thing done in his honour—the first clear sign of the split in his personality which was to have such fatal consequences, for her and for so many others.

There were three hundred guests. The chair was taken by Professor Laverock, as a distinguished representative of modern painting, and he declared Mann to be the equal of Blake in vision, of Forain in technique, of Shelley in clear idealism. Representatives of the intellectual theatre of the time were present and spoke, but the theatre of success was unrepresented. There were critics, literary men, journalists of both sexes, idealists of both sexes, arrivists, careerists, everybody who had ever pleaded publicly for the theatre as a vehicle of art. Professor Laverock declared it to be Mann's mission to open the theatre to the musician, the poet, and the painter, and, if he might express his secret hope, to close it to the actor. There were many speeches, but Clara sat through them all staring straight in front of her, wondering if a single person in the room really understood what Charles wanted and what he meant. Whether they did so or not, Charles did not help them much, for in response to the toast of his health he rose, beamed boyishly at the company and said, 'I'm so happy to be back. Thank you very much. The theatre needs love. I give you my love.'

He sat down so suddenly that Clara gasped, and was frightened for a second or two by the idea that he had been taken ill. But when she turned to where he sat, he was chatting gaily to his neighbour and seemed to be unaware of any omission. She heard a man near her say, 'I did hope he was going to be indiscreet,' and she felt with acute disappointment that this was just a dinner, just an entertainment among many dinners and entertainments, and she was ashamed.

Charles, however, was delighted. 'Such nice people,' he said, as they walked home, 'such delightful people, and what a good dinner!'

'Get away. I hate you. You're horrible,' cried Clara, flinging from him.

'*Now* what's the matter?' he asked, utterly taken aback.

'You're so easily pleased,' she answered. 'People have only to be nice to you and you think the whole world is Heaven.'

'So it is with you, chicken.'

'Oh! Don't be so pleased! Don't be so pleased! Do lose your temper with me sometimes! I'm not a child.'

'But they *were* nice people.'

'They weren't. They were dreadful people. They were only there because they think you *may* succeed, and then there will be jobs for them all.'

'You see through people so much that you forget they are people at all.'

'That comes from living with you. I have to see through you to realise that you are a person....'

'Oh! I *am* a person then?'

'Only to me.... You reflect everybody else.'

'They are not worth more.'

'They are. Everybody is. If only you would be yourself to them, they would be themselves.'

'Oh!'

She had stung him, as she so often did, into self-realisation and self-criticism, a process so painful that, left to himself, he avoided it altogether.... He walked along moodily. They were crossing St James's Park. On the bridge he stopped, looked down into the water and said gloomily.

'I sometimes think that my soul is as placid and still and shallow as that water, and that you, like all the rest, have only seen your own reflection in me.... That's why I like the comfort of restlessness and change. Anything to break the stillness.'

'You couldn't say that if it were true,' she said.

'No. I suppose not,' and, with one of his astonishing changes of mood, he took her arm and began to talk of the day when he had first met her in Picquart's studio, where everybody was gay and lively except they two, so that he talked to her, and seemed to have been talking for ever and had no idea of ever ceasing to do so. And then he told her how better than even talking to her was being silent with her, and how all kinds of ideas in him that had been too shy to appear in solitude or with others had come tumbling out like notes of music because of her.

'I've nearly forgotten,' he said, 'what being in love is like. This was at the farthest end of love from that, something entirely new, so new as to be altogether outside life. I have had to grope back into it again.'

'I liked you,' said she, 'because you were English.'

'Did you?' He was puzzled. 'I thought that was precisely what I am not.'

Neither could be angry for very long, and neither could be rancorous. The enchantment in which they lived would sometimes disappear for a space, when they would suffer, and he would tell himself that he was too old for the girl, or that he was not the kind of man who could live with a woman, or that she was seducing him from his work, while she would just sit numbed until the enchantment came again. Without it there were moments when he seemed just ridiculous with his masses of papers, and Mr Clott, and his fussy insistence on being a great artist.... It was a keen pleasure to her to bring him back suddenly to physical things like food and clothes and to care for him. Sometimes he would forget everything except food and clothes, and then she lived in a horror lest he should remain so and lose altogether the power of abstraction and concentration which made him so singular and forceful, and so near the man she most deeply knew him to be if only some power, some event, even some accident, could make him realise it and force him out of his imprisonment and almost entombment in his own thoughts.

Her will concentrated on him anew and she said to herself, 'I can do it. I can do it. I know I can, and I will.' And when she was in these fierce passions she used to remember her grandfather, the kindly old bibliophile, looking anxiously at her and saying,—

'My dear, when you want a thing just look round and see if there aren't one or two other things you want.'

But she had never understood what he meant, and she had never been able to look round, for always there was one thing she wanted, and when she wanted it she could not help herself, but had to sacrifice everything, friends, possessions, even love. And as time went on, she realised that it was not Charles she wanted so much as some submerged quality in him. The object of her desire being simplified, her will set, only the more firmly, even rigidly.

It made her analyse him ruthlessly; his childish lack of self-criticism, his placidity, his insatiable vanity, his almost deliberate exploitation of his personal charm, all these things she cast aside and ignored. She came then to his thoughts, and here she was baffled because she knew so little of his history. Beyond his thoughts lay that in which she was passionately interested, but between her and it danced innumerable Charleses all inviting her attention, all bidding her look away from that one Charles Mann for whom she hungered with something of the worship which religious women have for their Saviour.

He was immensely kind to her, almost oppressively kind. He could never be otherwise to any living creature—in personal contact, but without that he was careless, indifferent, forgetful, although when she saw him again it was as though he had never been away. They were considered a charming and most devoted couple, and their domestic felicity helped him in his success.

Much talk in the newspapers, many committees—but Clara felt that merely another Charles was being created to dance between her and her desire. This was too far from what she wanted, and she could not see how it could lead to it; there was altogether too much talk. What he said was very fine but it merely gathered a rather flabby set of people round him—and most exasperatingly he liked it and them... 'Such nice people.'

'That is all very well,' said Clara, 'but we are spending far more than there is any possibility of your making.'

'There are rich men interested,' said Charles.

'But until you make money, they won't give you any.'

Hard sense was always too much for him, and he retired puzzled and rather pained from the argument.

Because she was beautiful she attracted many men, many flatterers, but as they penetrated her graciousness, they came upon the hard granite of her will and were baffled, unpleasantly disturbed, and used to leave her, darting angry glances at the blissful Charles, who was sublimely unconscious of criticism in those whom he approached. He accepted them as they were or seemed to be and expected the like from them. He was too busy, too eager, to question or to look for hidden motives in those who supported him, and that he was concealing anything or had anything to conceal never crossed his mind! He had other things to think of, always new things, new plans, new schemes, and he was fundamentally not interested in himself. A charming face, a lovely cloud in the sky, the scent of a flower, a glass of good wine could give him such delight as made him beam upon the world and find all things good. It was always a trifle which sent him soaring like a singing lark, always a trifle that could lift him from the depths of depression. Great emotion he did not seem to need, though the concentrated emotion with which he hurled himself at his work was tremendous. Happy is the people that has no history. For all that he was aware of, Charles had no history. He was born again every morning, and he could not realise that the world went grinding on from day to day....

Never had life been so sweet, never had he been so successful, never had he had so much money, never had he been so exquisitely cared for, never had so many doors been open to him, never had such pleasant things been said of him! He went to bed singing, and singing he awoke in the morning, but in her heart Clara was anxious and suspicious of London, most suspicious of the artists and literary men who thronged the house, and gathered at the elaborate supper which Charles insisted on giving every Sunday night. They were too denunciatory, too much aloof, too proud of their aloofness, and talked too much. She thought Charles too good for them and said so.

'Art is a brotherhood,' he said magnificently, 'and the meanest of the brethren is my equal.'

'That is no reason why you should be familiar with them. You cheapen yourself. Besides it is a waste of time.... A lot of people never do anything, and—I don't like it.'

'Ho! ho! Are you in revolt, chicken?'

'I don't want you to fritter away what you have got. It isn't worth while to spend money on people who can do nothing for you.'

'I don't want anybody to do anything for *me*. It is for art.'

'But they don't understand that. They think all sorts of wonderful things are going to happen through you.'

'So they are.... Hasn't it been wonderful so far?'

'For us. Yes.'

'Wasn't the exhibition a great success?'

'Yes.'

'Very well then.'

'But you only sold the work you have done during the last ten years. It is the work you are doing now that matters. What work are you doing?'

'Plenty—plenty. Mr Clott sends out not less than forty letters a day. And I have just invented some beautiful designs for *Volpone*.'

'Is it going to be done?'

'It will be when they see my designs.'

Clara bit her lip. This was precisely what she had hoped to scotch by coming to London. In Paris he had made marvellous designs. Artists had come to look at them and then they had been put away in a portfolio.

'What I want,' said he, 'is a patron, some one who, having made his money in soap, or pills, or margarine, wishes to make reparation through art.... Michael Angelo had a patron and I ought to have one, so that I can do for my theatre what he did for the Sistine Chapel.'

They didn't build the Sistine Chapel for him.'

'No.... N—o,' he mumbled.

'Don't you see that things are different *now*, Charles. Everything has to pay nowadays, and there aren't great public works for artists to do. Michael Angelo was an engineer as well.... You couldn't design a theatre without an architect now, could you?'

'Why should I when there are architects to do it?' He was beginning to get angry.

'If you could you would be able to carry out your own theories as well.... People want something more than drawings on paper....'

'You talk as though I had done nothing.'

'It has been too easy.... Appreciation is so easy for the kind of people who come here. It costs nothing, and they get a good deal in return.'

'Don't you worry about me, chick. I'm a great deal more practical than you suppose.'

'I only want to know,' she said, rising to leave the room, 'because, if you are not going to work, I must.'

'My dearest child,' he shouted, 'don't be so impatient. It is only a question of time. My book is not out yet. We are arranging for the reviews now. When that is done then the ball will really be set rolling.'

'To be quite frank with you,' retorted Clara. 'I hate it all being on paper. I am going to learn acting, and I'm going on the stage to find out what the theatre is like.... I don't see how else I can help you, and if I can't help you I must leave you.'

He protested loudly against that, so loudly and so vehemently that she pounced and, with her eyes blazing, told him that she intended to make her own career, and that whether it fitted in with his depended entirely upon himself.

'I won't have you wasted,' she cried, 'I won't. It has been going on too long, this writing down on paper, and drawing designs on paper, and now with all these columns about you in the papers you look like being smothered in paper. You might as well be a politician or an adventurer—You have no passion.'

'I! No passion!'

'On paper. The world's choked with paper, and London is stifled with it. My grandfather told me that. He spent his life travelling and reading old books—running away from it. I'm not going to run away from it, and I am not going to let you be smothered by it——'

'How long has this been simmering up in you?'

'Ever since that first day when you were interviewed.... We're not living our own lives at all, but the lives dictated to us by this ridiculous machinery that turns out papers ten times a day. We're——'

'Very well,' said Charles submissively. 'What do you want me to do?'

'I want you to keep your appointment with Sir Henry Butcher.'

He pulled a long face.

'You'll hate it, I know,' she added, 'but there is the theatre, and you've got to make the best of it. I dare say Michael Angelo didn't care particularly for the Sistine Chapel.'

III

IMPERIUM

Sir Henry Butcher sat in his sanctum, pulling his aggressive, bulbous nose, and ruefully turning over the account presented by his manager of the last week's business with his new production, a spectacular version of *Ivanhoe*, in which he appeared as Isaac of York.

'No pull,' he muttered. 'No pull.' And to console himself he took up a little pink packet of Press cuttings, and perused them.... 'Wonderful notices! Wonderful notices! It's these confounded music-halls and cinemas, lowering the people's taste. Yet the public's loyal, wonderfully loyal.

Must be the play. Wish I'd read the book before I let old Kinslake have his three hundred. Told me everybody had read it....'

Sir Henry was a man of sixty, well-preserved, with the soft, infantine quality which grease paint imparts to the skin. He had an enormous head, large dark eyes, sly and humorous, in which, as his shallow whimsical thoughts flitted through his brain, mischief glinted. He was surrounded with portraits of himself in his various successes, and above his head was a bust of himself in the character of Napoleon. Every now and then, when he remembered it, he compressed his lips, and tucked his chin into his breast, but he could not deceive even himself, much less anybody else, and his habitual expression was that of a bland baby miraculously endowed with a knowledge of the world's mischief.

His room was luxurious but dark, being lit only by a skylight. The walls were lined with a dull gold lincrusta, and on them were hung portraits of the proprietor of the Imperium and a series of drawings for the famous Imperium posters, which had through many years brightened the gloomy streets of London and its ever expanding outskirts. Sir Henry's mischievous eyes flitted from drawing to drawing, and his tongue passed over his thick lips as he tasted again the savour of his success—more than twenty unbroken years of it. He thought of the crowded houses, the brilliant audiences he had gathered together, the happy speeches he had made, the banquets he had held after so many first performances—and then he thought of *Ivanhoe*, a mistake. Worse than a mistake, a strategical blunder, for now had come the time when his crowning ambition should be fulfilled, to have the Imperium unofficially acknowledged as the national theatre, so that when he retired it should be purchased for the nation and make his achievement immortal.... Macready, Irving, all of the great line had perished and were but names, while Henry Butcher would be remembered as the creator of the theatre, the people's theatre, the nation's theatre.... Then he remembered a particularly delicious wine he had drunk in this very room at supper, after rehearsal with the brilliant woman who had steered him through his early career and had saved him again and again from disaster—Teresa Chesney. Ah! there was no one like her now, no one. Actresses were ladies now, they were not of the theatre.... There was no one now with whom a bottle of old claret had so divine a flavour.... She would never have let him produce *Ivanhoe*. She would have read the book for him. She always used to stand between him and those idiots at the club.

He went to the tantalus on his sideboard and poured himself out a brandy and soda, and drank to Teresa's memory, and then to the portrait of his wife, who had been so wonderfully skilful in decorating the front of the house with Dukes, Duchesses, and celebrities, but it needed Teresa's power behind the scenes.

It was very distressing that all qualities could not be found in one woman, and a mocking litany floated through Sir Henry's brain, 'One for the front of the house, one for the back, one for paragraphs, one for posters, but a man for business.'

He lay back in his chair and cudgelled his brains for some means of turning *Ivanhoe* from a disastrous failure into an apparent success, but no idea came, and throwing out his long legs and caressing his round belly he said,—

'If I paint my nose red, and give myself two large eyebrows they'll laugh, and it might go. I must have a play in which I enter down the chimney....'

The telephone by his side rang.

'Yes. I'm terribly busy, terribly.... Very well. I'll ring as soon as I can see him.'

He put down the receiver, flung out his legs once more, and resumed his thoughts.

'I might pay a visit to America. They keep sending people over here.' But his memory twinged as he thought of the insulting criticisms he had encountered on his last visit to Broadway.

'Teresa would tell me what to do. Some one told me Scott was the next best thing to Shakespeare. Oh, well!'

He put his hand to a bell-button in the arm of his chair, and in a few moments his secretary ushered in Mr Charles Mann. Sir Henry rose, drew himself up to his full height, but even then had to look up at his visitor.

'How d'you do? I remember you as a boy, and I remember your father. I even remember his father at Drury Lane.... Pity you've broken the tradition. The public is proud of the old theatrical families.... I'm sorry you wouldn't take that part I offered you. I saw your photograph in the papers and your face was the very thing, and, besides, your return to the stage would have been interesting.'

Charles bristled, and flung his portfolio and large black hat down on the table.

'I have brought you my designs for *Volpone*.'

'For what?'

'*Volpone*—a comedy by Ben Jonson.'

'Oh, Ben Jonson!'

Sir Henry was depressed. He had met people before who had talked to him about the Old Dramatists.

Charles opened his portfolio.

'These are designs I have just completed. You see, classical, like Ben's mind.'

'It looks immensely high,' said Sir Henry, his eyes twinkling.

'That,' replied Charles, 'is what I want, so that the figures are dwarfed.'

'I should have to alter my proscenium,' chuckled Sir Henry, and Charles, who missed the chuckle, continued eagerly,—

'I should like it played by dolls.'

Sir Henry turned over the drawings and played with the money in his pocket.

'You never saw my *King Lear*, did you?'

'I have seen pictures of it. Too realistic. A visit to Stonehenge would have answered the same purpose. You would have then to make such a storm as would drown the storm in *Lear*.'

Sir Henry remembered his part and fetched up an enormous voice from his stomach and roared,—

'Rage, blow and drown the steeples.' Then he kept his voice rumbling in his belly and tapped with his foot like the bass-trumpet man in a street band.

'Superb,' cried Charles.

'My voice?' asked Sir Henry, now very pleased with himself.

'My drawings,' replied Charles, rubbing his thumb along a line that especially delighted him.

'O Heavens!' Sir Henry paid no further attention to the drawings and drawled, 'Wonderful thing the theatre.' There's life in it—life! I hate leaving it. You haven't been to my room before?'

'I once waited for two hours downstairs to ask you to give me a part. You didn't see me and I gave up acting.

'Oh! and now when I offer you a part you refuse it——'

'Things are very different now.... I have had a great welcome back to London.'

'What do you think of a national theatre?'

'Every nation, every city, ought to have its theatre.'

'Mine is the best theatre in London.'

'You won't do *Volpone*? It is one of the finest comedies ever written.'

'I never heard of its being done.'

Charles flung his drawings back into his portfolio, seized his hat, crammed it on to his head, and had reached the door when Sir Henry called him back.

'What do you say to *The Tempest*?'

'It doesn't need scenery.'

'Oh, come! The ship, the yellow sands. Prospero's cave—pictures all the way—and the masque.... I want to do *The Tempest* shortly and I should be glad of your assistance.'

'I should expect you to buy my drawings and to pay me ten thousand pounds.'

Sir Henry ignored that. He knew his man by reputation. Ten thousand pounds meant no more to him than one and sixpence. He merely mentioned the first figures that came into his head. Sir Henry resumed,—

'I want *The Tempest* to be my first Autumn production. I place my theatre at your disposal.... To be quite frank with you, that was why I offered you that part. The theatre wants something new. The Russian ballet has upset people. They are expecting something startling.... Poor old Smithson who has painted my scenery for twenty years is horrified when I suggest anything of the kind.'

'If I do *The Tempest* for you will you join my committee?'

'Er—I—er—You must give me time to think it over. You know we managers have to think of each other.'

Charles began to wish he had not come. The suggestion of mysterious influences behind Sir Henry alarmed him, and at home was the furious energy in Clara forcing him into the embraces of this huge machine of a theatre, which discarded his *Volpone* and required him to do something for which he had not the smallest inclination. Yet so implicit was his faith in her, so wonderful had been his life since she came into it, that he accepted the accuracy of her divination of the futility of his procedure through artists and literary persons, who would feed upon his fame and increase it to have more to devour.... He decided then to say no more about his committee for the present, to accept Sir Henry's offer, and to escape as quickly as possible from the stifling room, with its horrible drawings, and its atmosphere in which were blended a fashionable restaurant and a stockbroker's office. He had not felt so uncomfortable since he had been a schoolboy in the presence of his head master, and yet he enjoyed a European reputation, while outside the Anglo-Saxon world Sir Henry was hardly known.

The great actor condescendingly escorted the great artist down the heavily carpeted stairs to a private door which led to the dress circle. The theatre was in darkness. The seats were covered up in their white sheets, and Sir Henry looked round him and sighed,—

'Ah! cold, cold, a theatre soon grows cold. But it possesses you. Art is very like a woman. She only yields up her treasure to the purest passion.'

'Art has nothing to do with women,' Charles rapped out, and, as Sir Henry had only been making a phrase, he was not offended. Charles shook the large fat hand which was held out to him, and plunged into the street.... Ah! It was good to be in the air again, to gaze up at the sky, to see the passers-by moving about their business. There was a stillness about the theatre which made him think of Sir Henry in his room as rather like a large pale fish swimming about in a tank in a dark aquarium.... After his years of freedom in delightful countries, where people were in no hurry and were able most charmingly to do nothing in particular for weeks on end, the captivity of so eminent and powerful a person appalled and crushed him.... He had not encountered anything like it in his previous sojourn in London, and he was again possessed with the bewildered rage that had seized him when he saw the rebuilt station on his arrival. He had been out of it all for so long, yet he was of it, and he shuddered away from the increased captivity of London, yet longed to have been part of it.... It was almost bewilderingly a new city. During his absence, the immense change from horse to petrol-driven vehicles had taken place and a new style of architecture had been introduced. The air was cleaner: so were the streets. Shop windows were larger. There was everywhere more display, more colour, more and swifter movement, and yet in the theatre was that deadly stillness.

He turned into a magnificent shop, where all the flowers looked rather like little girls dressed up for a party, and ordered some roses to be sent to Clara, for whom he had begun to feel a rudimentary responsibility. It comforted him to do that. Somehow it broke the stillness which had infected him, and most profoundly shocked him, so different was it from the theatre in which he had been born and bred, the rather fatuous, very sentimental theatre which was inhabited by simple kind-hearted vagabonds, isolated from the world of morals and religion, yet passionately proud of their calling, and setting it above both morals and religion. But this theatre, magnificent in this new magnificent London, was empty and still. So much of the theatre that had been dear to him was gone, and he mourned for it, lamented, too, over his own folly, for he was suddenly brought face to face with the fact that the theatre he proposed so light-heartedly to overthrow, the theatre of the actor, had disappeared. In attacking it he was beating the air. He had to deal with a new enemy.

As he was emerging from St James's Park into Victoria Street a woman accosted him. He looked at her, did not recognise her, and moved to pass on, for he was fastidious and took no interest in chance women. She was a little woman, very alert, and she was rather poorly dressed. She was young, but already her lips had stiffened into the hardness of baffled hope and passion and her eyes smouldered with that extraordinary glow which rouses a pity as cold as ice.

'I saw you were back in the papers,' she said. 'It's a pity you can't hide yourself.'

Charles stared at her, stared and stared, cast about for some excuse for pretending not to know her but remained rooted.

'You're not so young as you were,' she went on. 'There's a lot of talk about you in the papers, but I know you; it's all talk.'

'My good woman,' said he, 'is that all you have to say?'

'It'll keep,' said she, and she turned abruptly and left him, feeling that all the strength had gone out of his legs, all the feeling from his bowels, leaving only a nauseating pity which brought up memory upon memory of horrible emotions, without any physical memory to fix them so that he was at their mercy. At last physical memories began to emerge, rather ridiculously, theatrical lodgings, provincial theatres, the arcades at Birmingham. And a blue straw hat that he had

bought for her long ago; and at last her name. Kitty Messenger, and her mother, a golden-haired actress with a tongue like a flail in one temper, like the honey-seeking proboscis of a bee in another.

'I had forgotten,' said Charles to himself. 'I really had forgotten. Well—money will settle it. I shall have to do *The Tempest* for that fish.'

Thinking of the money restored his sense of serenity. Wonderful money that can swamp so many ills: money that means work done somewhere—work, the sole solace of human misery. But Charles had no notion of the relation between work and money, or that in using up large quantities of it he was diverting to his own uses more than his fair share of the comfort of humanity. He had so much to give if only humanity would take—and pay for it. What he had to give was beyond price, wherefore he had no qualms in setting his price high.... From *The Tempest* boundless wealth would flow. He quickly persuaded himself of that, and by the time he reached his furnished house had lulled his alarm to sleep and had allayed the disgust and loathing of the past roused in him by the meeting with Kitty Messenger.... So rosy had the vision become under the influence of his potential wealth that he met Clara without a qualm, and forgot even that Sir Henry was like a fish in an aquarium.

'We got on splendidly,' he said, 'and I am to have the whole theatre for *The Tempest* in the Autumn.'

'I told you I was right,' said she.

'Bless you, child,' he cried. 'You always are, always. And now we will go out and drink champagne—Here's a health unto His Majesty, with a fal-lal-la.'

He was like a rebellious boy, and Clara disliked that mood in him, because he was rather rough and cumbrous in his humour, cracked gusty and rather stupid jokes, ate voraciously, and drank like a carter.

They went to a most elegant restaurant, where their entry created a stir, and it was whispered from end to end of the room who he was. And the girl with him? People shrugged.... Clara's eyes were alight, and she looked from table to table at the sleek, well-groomed men, and the showy women with their gaudy hair ornaments, bare powdered shoulders, and beautiful gowns. She looked from face to face searching eagerly for—she knew not what; power, perhaps, some power which should justify their costly elegance. This hurt as a lie hurt her, because, as she gazed from person to person, she could not divine the individuality beneath the uniform, and she was still young enough to wish to do so.... Meanwhile, as she gazed, Charles ate and drank lustily, and, it must be admitted, noisily. There was no suppression of individuality about Charles. It brimmed over in him. He had gone to that restaurant to enjoy himself; not because it was a place frequented by successful persons.... Clara's eyes came back to him. Yes, she preferred her Charles to every one else, if only—if only he would realise that she thought of other things besides himself.

From a table near by a very good-looking man came and tapped Charles on the shoulder.

'There's no mistaking you, old chap,' he said. 'I'm just back from America. They think a lot of you over there since your conquest of London.'

'You haven't met my wife,' said Charles, with his mouth full. 'What a splendid place this is! Chicken, this is Freeland Moore. We were together in the old days with the Old Man.'

'I was with him when he died,' said Freeland, 'died in harness. There's no one like him now.'

'Who?' asked Clara, alive at once to even the memory of a great personality.

'Henry Irving. He was a prince, and kept royalty alive in England. It seems a long time ago now. Won't you come over and join us for coffee, when you have finished? I am with Miss Julia Wainwright; she's with us at the Imperium. Not for long, I'm afraid. It's a wash-out.'

'Ah!' said Charles, remembering Sir Henry's depressed glance round the theatre, and he saw himself restoring splendour and success to the Imperium.

After dinner they went over to Mr Moore's table, and Clara, shaking hands with Miss Wainwright, warmed to the large, generous creature with her expansive bosom, her drooping figure, her tinted face and hair and ludicrously long soft eyes. There was room in Miss Wainwright for a dozen Claras. She looked sentimentally and with amazement spreading in ripples over her big face at the girl's wedding-ring and said,—

'So pleased to meet you, child. I made Freeland go over and fetch you.... You're not on the stage, are you?'

'No,' replied Clara, 'but I'm going to be.'

'It is not what it was,' resumed Miss Wainwright, sipping her *crème de menthe*.' The Wainwrights have always been in the profession, but I'm sending my boy to a public-school....

You're not English, are you?'

'Oh, yes,' answered Clara, 'but I have always lived abroad in Italy and Germany and France with my grandfather. My father and mother died in India, but I was born in London.'

'If you want to get about,' said Miss Wainwright, 'there's nothing like the profession. I've been in Australia, Ceylon, South Africa, America, but never Canada.... I'm just back from America with Freeland, and we took the first thing that came along—*Ivanhoe*. It's a lovely show but the play's no good.... Why not come and see it? Freeland, go and telephone Mr Gillies to keep a box for Mrs Mann.'

Freeland obeyed, treading the floor of the restaurant as though it were a stage.

'I suppose you're not sorry you gave up acting, Charles,' said Miss Wainwright, with her most expansive affability. She oozed charm, and surrounded Charles and Clara with it, so that almost for the first time Clara felt that she really was identified with her great man. Those who worshipped at the shrine of his greatness always regarded her as an adjunct and their politeness chilled her, but Miss Wainwright swept greatness aside and was delightfully concerned only with what she regarded as a striking and very happy couple.

Charles, who was absorbed in eating an orange, made no reply other than a grimace.

'I don't know how you did it.... I couldn't. Once a player, always a player—money or no money, and there's a great deal more money in it than there used to be.'

Freeland Moore returned, announced that a box had been reserved, and, telling Miss Wainwright that it was time to go, he helped her on with her wrap of swan's down and velvet....

'I'll come and call if I may,' said Miss Wainwright, with a billowing bow, and, with a magnificent setting of all her sails she moved away from the table, and, taking the wind of approval from her audience, the other diners, she preened her way out.

'Pouf! Pah! Pah!' said Charles, shaking back his mane. 'Pouf! The stink of green-paint.'

'I'm sure she's the kindest woman in the world.'

'So are they all,' growled Charles, 'dripping with kindness or burning with jealousy.... The theatrical woman!—It's a modern indecency.'

'And suppose I became one.'

'You couldn't.'

'But I'm going to.'

'You'd never stand it for a week, my dear. I'd ... I'd ...'

'What would you do?'

'I'd forbid it.'

'Then I should not stay with you.... You know that.'

Charles knew it. He had learned painfully that though she had some respect for his opinion, she had none for his authority.

He had more coffee, liqueurs, fruit, a cigar, gave the waiter a tip which sent him running to fetch the noble diner's overcoat, and, hailing a taxi, they drove the few hundred yards to the Imperium, where he growled, grunted, muttered, dashed his hands through his hair, and she sat with her eyes glued on the stage, and her brows puckered as the dull, illiterate version of Scott's novel, denuded of all dramatic quality, was paraded before her.... In an interval, Charles asked her what she thought of it.

'It is death,' she said. 'It is nothing but money.'

'Money,' repeated Charles. 'Money.... Whose money? ...' And he suddenly felt again that splendid feeling of confidence. With his *Tempest* all the money in that place should sustain beauty, and every ugly thing, every ugly thought should disappear. He touched Clara's hair, and for the first time, somewhat to his alarm, realised that she was something more than an amusing and delightful child, and that he had married her.

He looked down from the box into the stalls, and wondered if behind the white-shirt fronts and the bare bosoms there were also anxious thoughts and uneasy emotions, and if everybody had troubles that lurked in the past and might race ahead of them to meet them in the future.... Then he laughed at himself. After all, whatever happened, his fame grew, and he went on being Charles Mann.

IV

BEHIND THE SCENES

Miss Julia Wainwright might be sentimental, and she might be jealous, but she was shrewd, and she understood intuitively the relationship between Charles and Clara. At first she refused to believe that they were married, as Charles was notoriously careless in these matters, but when she was faced with the fact her warm heart warned her of tragedy and she took it upon herself to inform Clara of the mysterious difficulties of married life, especially for two sensitive people.

'Charles wants a stupid woman and you want a stupid man,' she said.

Clara, of course, refused to believe that, and said that with a stupid woman Charles would just rot away in a studio and grow more and more unintelligible.

'Never mind, then,' said Miss Wainwright. 'I'll show you round. If you are meant for the theatre nothing can keep you away from it. The only thing I can see against you is that you're a lady.'

'Is that against me?' asked Clara, a little astonished.

'Well,' replied Miss Wainwright, 'we're different.'

And indeed Clara discovered very soon that actors and actresses were different from other people, because they concealed nothing. Their personalities were entirely on view, and exposed for sale. They reserved nothing. Such as they were, they were for the theatre and for no other purpose, but to be moved at a moment's notice from theatre to theatre, from town to town, from country to country. They were refreshing in their frank simplicity, compared with which life with Charles was oppressive in its complexity.

As she surveyed the two, Clara was torn asunder for a time and was reluctant to take the plunge, and yet she knew that this was the world to which Charles belonged, this world of violent contrasts, of vivid light and shadowy darkness, of painted illusion and the throbbing reality of the audience, of idle days and feverish nights. His mind was soaked in it, and his soul, all except that obscure part of it that delighted in flowers and in her own youth, hungered for it, and yet it seemed she had to force him into it.... If only he had a little more will, a little more intelligence.

Often she found herself thinking of him as 'poor Charles,' and then she set her teeth, and shook back her hair, and vowed that no one should ever think of her as 'poor Clara.' ... Life had been so easy when they had drifted together from studio to studio, but it threatened to be mighty difficult now that they had squared up to life and to this huge London....

Ivanhoe staggered on for six weeks and then collapsed, and an old successful melodrama was revived to carry the Imperium over the early summer months. In this production, as a protégée of Miss Wainwright's, Clara played a small part in which she had ten words to say.... She was quite inaudible though she seemed to herself to be using every atom of voice in her slim young body, but always her voice seemed to fill her own head until it must surely burst.

'Nerves,' said Miss Wainwright. 'You'll get your technique all right, and then you won't hear yourself speak any more than you do when you are talking in a room. It's just a question of losing yourself, and that you learn to do unconsciously.... It'll come all right, dearie. It'll come all right.'

Clara was determined that it should come all right, though she knew it would not until she had overcome her loathing of painting her face, and pencilling her eyes, and dabbing red paint into the corners of them. So much did she detest this at first that her personality repudiated this false projection of herself and left her helpless. Over and over again she said to herself,—

'I shall never be an actress. I shall never be an actress....' But then again she said, 'I will.'

There was a violence in appearing in the glaring light before so many people which offended her deeply, and yet she knew that she was wrong to be offended, because the people had come not to look at her, Clara Day, but at the false projection of Clara Day which was needed for the play.... Her objection was moral, and so strong that it made her really ill, and it was with the greatest difficulty that she could keep going at all, but not a word did she say to a soul. She fought through it with clenched teeth, going through agony night after night, smiling when it was over, going home exhausted, and dreading the coming of the morrow when it would all have to be borne again....

She used to look at the others and wonder if they had been through the same thing, but it was plain to her clear eyes that they had nearly all accepted without a struggle, and had surrendered to the false projection of themselves which the theatre needed. Stage-fright they knew, but not this moral struggle in which, determined not to be beaten, she fought on.

Rehearsals she enjoyed. Then the actors were at their indolent best, and the half-lit stage was full of a dim, suggestive beauty, which entirely disappeared by the time the scene-painter, the lime-light man, and the stage-carpenter had done their work. Often at rehearsal, words would give her the shock of truth that in performance would just puzzle her by their banality; voices would seem to come from some remote recess of life; movements would take on dignity; the players seemed indeed to move and live in an enchanted world.... And so, off the stage, they did.

Miss Wainwright and Mr Freeland Moore, who had played together for so many years, were idyllic lovers, though he had a wife in America, and she a husband who had gone his ways. To them there were no further stages of love than those which are shown to the Anglo-American public. For them there were but Romeo and Juliet at the ball with no contending houses to plague them. They lived in furnished flats and paid their way, impervious to every conspiracy of life to bring them down to earth.... Both adored Clara, both soon accepted her and Charles as lovers even more perfect than themselves, because younger, and both were never tired of thinking what kindness they could next do to help their friends.

And Clara struggled on. Sometimes she could have screamed with rage against the theatre, and these people whose enchantment had been won by the sacrifice of the fiery essence of themselves, so that they accepted meekly insults from the manager, from the stage-manager, from the very dressing-room staff of the theatre, who could make their lives uncomfortable. She understood then what it was that had driven Charles out, and made him so reluctant to return, and why his immense talent, which should have been expressed in terms of the theatre, was reduced to making what, after all, were only notes on paper. Convinced that she could help to bring him back from exile, she struggled on, though the strain increased as more and more fiercely she had to pit her will against the powerful machinery of the theatre.

Everybody was kind to her, though many were alarmed by the intent force with which she set about her work. Very often she had no energy left for conversation, and would then take refuge in a book, a volume of Meredith, or Bernard Shaw, Schopenhauer or Browning, who had been the poet of her first discovery of the world of books. That frightened off the young men, who were at first greatly taken with her charm. They were subdued themselves as everybody was, from the business manager down, but her silence chilled and alarmed them.... Except those she bought herself, she never saw a book in the theatre.

At first, full of Charles's fierce denunciation of Sir Henry Butcher, she detested the man, who seemed to her like some monster who absorbed all the vitality of the rest and used it to inflate his egoism. He never spoke to her for some weeks, and she avoided meeting him, did not wish to speak to him, felt, indeed, that she was perhaps using him a little unfairly in turning his theatre to her own ends, forcing herself to accept it in order to make things easier for Charles, to whom she used to go with a most vivid caricature of Sir Henry at rehearsals.

Until he appeared there was a complete languor upon the stage. The actors and actresses still had upon them the mood of breakfast-in-bed; some looked as though they were living in the day before yesterday and had given up all hope of catching up with the rest of the world; some of the men talked sport; all the women chattered scandal; some read their letters, others the telegrams by which their correspondence was conducted. In none was the slightest indication of preparedness for work, for the thoughts of all were obviously miles away from the theatre.... Stagehands moved noisily about. They, at least, were conscious of earning their living. Messages were brought in from the stage-door. Back cloths were let down: the fire-proof curtain descended slowly, and remained shutting out the vast and gloomy spaces of the auditorium, also a melancholy gray-haired lady who was the widow of the author of the melodrama in rehearsal.

Sir Henry appeared with a bald-headed Frenchman, with a red ribbon in his button-hole, his secretary, carrying a shorthand notebook, and a stout, thick-set Jew, who waited obsequiously for the great actor to take further notice of him. Sir Henry talked volubly and laughed uproariously. He was very happy and he beamed round the stage at his company. The ladies said,—

'Good-morning, Sir Henry.'

The gentlemen said,—

'Morning.'

Sir Henry gesticulating violently turned away and began in French to tell a humorous story to which the Frenchman said, '*Oui, oui*,' and the Jew said, '*Oui, oui*,' while Clara, who could speak French as fluently as English, understood not a word of it; but this morning she liked Sir Henry because he was so happy and because he was so full of vitality.

His business with the Jew and the Frenchman was soon settled fairly to their satisfaction. They went away, and Sir Henry began to collect his thoughts. He turned to his secretary and asked,—

'We are rehearsing a play, eh? All these ladies and gentlemen are not here for nothing, eh? What play?'

'*The Golden Hawk*.'

'Ah! Yes.... I have rehearsed so many plays.... I am thinking of my big Autumn success.... I can feel it in the air. I can always feel it. I felt that *Ivanhoe* was no good, but I was over-persuaded. My instinct is always right. The business men and the authors are always wrong....'

He flew into a sudden passion, and roared, 'Who the hell let down the fire-proof? I hate the thing. Take it away. How can a man rehearse to a fire-proof curtain? Take it away. Send it to the London County Council who inflicted it on me. I don't want it.'

The stage-manager shouted to a man in the flies,—

'Fire-proof up.'

'I never let it down,' came a voice.

'Who did then?'

The stage-manager came over to where Clara was standing and pressed a button. The heavy fire-proof curtain slowly rose to reveal the author's widow sitting patiently with the dark empty theatre for background.

Who's that lady?' asked Sir Henry.

'The author's widow,' replied the secretary.

'I was afraid it was his ghost,' said Sir Henry, with his mischievous chuckle. He went to her and chatted to her for a few moments about her late husband, who had been something of a figure in his time and had made a career in the traffic in French plays adapted for the British theatre.

A scene or two was rehearsed, when an artist arrived with a model for a 'set' for *The School for Scandal*. The company gathered round and admired, while Sir Henry sat and played with it, trying various lighting effects with an electric torch.

'No,' he said, 'you can't get the effects with electric light that you used to be able to obtain with gas.... Give me gas. The theatre has never been the same. This electric light is cold. It is killing the theatre.'

When the artist had gone, a journalist arrived for an interview, which was granted on condition that an article by Sir Henry on British Audiences was printed, and for the rest of the morning the secretary was kept busy taking down notes for the article.

For Clara it was a very delightful morning. Her own scene was not reached, and she sat happily in a corner by the proscenium turning over the pages of her book, watching Sir Henry's antics, appreciating the skill with which, in spite of all his digressions, he kept things lively, and managed to get the work he wanted out of his company....

As the players dispersed, he stood in the middle of the stage and sighed heavily. Clara was for stealing away, when he strode across to her, seized her by the arm, and said in his deep rolling voice,—

'Don't go, little girl. Don't go.'

'But I want to go,' replied she. 'And I'm not a little girl. I'm a married lady.'

'Ah! marriage makes us all so old,' said Sir Henry, with a gallant sigh.... 'You're the little girl who reads books, aren't you? I've heard of you. I've written a book or two, but I never read them. I have quite a lot of books upstairs in my room—given me by the authors.... Won't you come to lunch? I feel I could talk to you.'

He had suddenly dropped his mannerisms, his affectation of thinking of a thousand and one things at once, and was a simple and very charming person of no particular age, position, or period—just a human being who wanted for a little to be at his ease. He took Clara by the arm, and, regardless of the staring eyes of those whom they met in the corridors, swept her along to the room which Charles had likened to an aquarium. Then he made her sit in the most comfortable chair, while he bestrode another not a yard away, and stared at her with his extraordinary eyes, which never had one but always the suggestion of a hundred different expressions.

'I love my room,' he said, 'it is the only place I have in the world. Don't you like it?'

'It is very quiet,' said Clara.

Sir Henry rang a bell and ordered lunch to be brought up, vol-au-vents, cold chicken, Crème Caramel, champagne.

'You're not old enough to understand food,' he said. 'That comes with the beginning of wisdom.'

'But I understand food very well,' protested Clara, 'my grandfather knew all there was to know about it.'

'Ah! You are used to old men, eh? Boys don't exist for you, eh?'

With extraordinary gusto he produced a photograph album, and showed her portraits of himself at various ages, slim and romantic at twenty, at forty impressively Byronic, at fifty monumentally successful—and 'present day.' He showed her portraits of his mother and father, his wife, his children, Miss Teresa Chesney in her pieces, his various leading ladies, his sisters who had both married noble lords, and of a large number of actors and actresses who had passed through his company. Of them he talked with real knowledge and enthusiasm. He adored acting for its own sake, and as he talked brought all these performers vividly before Clara's eyes so that she must accept the validity of his criticism: he knew, or seemed to know, exactly what each could do or could not do, though it was difficult to understand how he could ever have found time to see them all. Whether or not he had done so, he had exactly weighed up the value of their theatrical personalities, and it was in those and those alone that he was interested. As human beings, he was indifferent to them, though he spoke of them all with the exaggerated affection common to the theatre—'dear old Arthur' ... 'adorable Lily' ... 'delicious Irene. Ah! she's a good woman.' He talked rhapsodically, and his talk rather reminded Clara of Liszt's music, until lunch came, and then his greedy pleasure in the food made her think of certain gluttonous musicians she had known in Germany. He ate quickly, and his eyes beamed satisfaction at her, so young, so fresh, so altogether unusual and challenging.... She would neither eat nor drink, so absorbed was she in this strange man who so overwhelmingly imposed his personality upon her until she felt that she was merely part of the furniture of the room.

When he had done eating and drinking, he lit a cigar and lay back in his large chair, and closed his eyes in the ecstatic distention of his surfeit. After a grunt or two, he turned suddenly and asked with a strange intensity,—

'Charles Mann—is he a genius?'

'Of course,' replied Clara.

'Then why does he talk so much?'

'He works very hard.'

'Hm!'

'You can't expect me to discuss him.'

'No, no. I only think it is a pity he gave up acting. He's lost touch with the public.... I've tried it at intervals; giving up acting, I mean. The public lose interest, and no amount of advertising will get it back.'

'It is for the artist to command the public,' said Clara, rather uncomfortably feeling that she was only an echo. It was a very curious thing that words in this room lost half their meaning, and she, who was accustomed to giving all her words their precise value, was rather at a loss.

'Little girl,' said Sir Henry, 'I feel that you understand me. That is rare. After all, we actors are human. We are governed by the heart in a world that is standing on its head.'

He took out a little book and made a note of that last observation. Then with a sigh he leaned over and held Clara's hands, looked long into her large dark eyes, and said,—

'With such purity you could outstare the angels.'

For answer Clara outstared him, and he dropped her hands and began to hum. 'Opera!' he said. 'I feel opera in the air; music invading the theatre, uplifting the souls of the people.... Ah! life is not long enough....'

Clara began to feel sorry for him though she knew in her heart that this was precisely what he wanted.

'You mustn't be angry,' he rumbled in his deepest bass, 'if I tell you that Charles Mann ought to have his neck wrung.'

'But—you are going to do his *Tempest*?'

'If it were not for you, little girl, I would not have him near the theatre,' said Sir Henry, with a sudden heat.

'How dare you talk like that?' Clara was all on fire. 'It is an honour for you to be associated with him at all.'

Sir Henry laughed.

'We know our Charles,' he said. 'We knew his father. We are not all so young as you.'

Clara hid her alarm, but it was as though the ground had suddenly opened and swallowed her up, as though the London about which she had been hovering in delighted excitement had engulfed her. And then she felt that she was failing Charles.

'I won't allow you to talk like that. I won't let Charles do *The Tempest* at all, if you talk like that. He is a very great genius, and it is your duty to let the public see his work. It is shameful that all his life people have talked about him, and have never helped him to reach his natural position. He has been an exile and but for me would still be so.'

'But for you,' repeated Sir Henry.... 'Would you like to play Miranda? A perfect Miranda, but where is Ferdinand?'

Clara was alarmed at this prospect. She had read *The Tempest* with her grandfather, and knew long passages by heart. Its beauty was in her blood, and she could not reconcile it with this theatre of Sir Henry Butcher's. Sitting with him in the heart of it, she felt trapped and as though all her dreams and purposes had been sponged out. Never before had she even suspected that her freedom could be extinguished; never before had she even been anywhere near feeling that her will might break and leave her at the mercy of circumstances. She clutched desperately at her loyalty to Charles, and she summoned up all her will only to find that it forced her to regard him, to weigh and measure him as a man.... He and she were no longer exiles, wandering untrammelled in strange lands, but here in London among their own people, confronted with their responsibility to the world outside themselves and to each other. She was prepared to accept it, but was he?

V

THE OTHER WOMAN

Clara could hardly remember ever having been unhappy before. All her life she had done exactly as she wished to do. Her grandfather had never gainsaid her: had always indulged her every caprice, and had supported her even when she had been to all outward seeming in the wrong. He used to say in his whimsical manner that explosions never did any one any harm.... 'It is all wrong,' thought she, as she left the sanctum, and she was alarmed for Charles as she was still vibrant from the hostility in the actor-manager. What was the occasion of it? She could not guess. It was incredible to her that any one could object to Charles, so kindly, so industrious, so simple in his work and his belief in himself. People laughed at him sometimes indulgently, but that was a very different thing to this hostility, this cold, implacable condemnation. That was beyond her, for she had been brought up in a school of absolute tolerance except of the vulgar and ill-mannered.

Her quick wits worked on this new situation. She divined that Sir Henry resented the intrusion of a personality as powerful as his own and the check upon his habit of exuding patronage. His theatre had always been animated with his own vitality, and he obviously resented a position in which he had to employ that of another and openly to acknowledge it.

'He wants to patronise Charles,' thought Clara, and then she decided that for once in a way it would be a good thing for Charles to submit to it. It must be either that or his chosen interminable procedure by committee.

She decided to take a walk to think it over, and as she moved along Piccadilly towards the Green Park, where she proposed to ponder her problem, she had a distressing idea that she was followed. Several times she turned and stopped, but she could see no one who could be pursuing her. Men stared at her, but none dared molest so purposeful a young woman.... She stayed for some time in the Green Park, turning over and over in her mind how best she could engage Sir Henry's interest without aggravating his hostility to Charles, and still she was aware of eyes upon her.... She walked away very fast, but as she turned out into the roadway in front of Buckingham Palace she turned, stopped, and was accosted by a little dark woman with a smouldering fury in her eyes.

'Are you Mrs Mann?' said the woman.

'Yes,' said Clara, at once on her guard.

'So am I,' rejoined the other woman.

'Oh, no!' said Clara, with a smile that barely concealed the catch at her heart.

'Oh, yes,' replied the other woman. 'I should think I was married to him before you were born. And I wasn't the only one. He left the country——'

Clara turned on her heel and walked away. The other woman followed her breathing heavily and gasping out details.

'You horrible woman,' cried Clara, unable at last to bear any more. 'Go away...' And in her heart she said—

'It is my fault. I made him marry me.'

Still the other woman was at her heels, babbling and gasping out her sordid little tragedy—-two children, no money, her mother to keep.

Clara was stunned and so nauseated that she could not speak. Only in her mind the thought went round and round,—

'It is my fault.... It is my fault.'

But Charles ought to have told her. He ought not to have been so will-less, so ready to fall in with every suggestion she made.

'I must have this out at once,' she said, and hailing a taxi she bundled the other woman into it and drove home. Charles was out. She ordered tea, and quickly had the whole story out—the lodgings in Birmingham, the intrigue, the ultimatum, Charles's catastrophic collapse and inertia, years of poverty in London going from studio to studio, lodging to lodging: his flight—with another woman: her struggles, her present hand to mouth existence on the outskirts of the musical comedy theatre.

'I wouldn't have spoken,' said Kitty, 'if you hadn't been so young.'

'I should have thought that was a reason for keeping quiet,' replied Clara, who was now almost frozen with horror.

'You were bound to hear sooner or later.'

Charles came in followed by Mr Clott. He was in the highest spirits and called out,—

'Darling, Lord Verschoyle is interested.'

His jaw dropped as he saw Kitty there at tea. His pince-nez fell off his nose, and he stood pulling at his necktie for a few seconds. Then he gave Mr Clott a commission to perform, and stood looking with horror, disgust, and loathing at the unhappy Kitty.... It was Clara who first found her voice,—

'I ... I brought her here, Charles,' she said. 'I thought it would save us all—trouble.'

In a tone icy with fury he said,—

'If you will go quietly, I will write to you. Please leave your address, and I will write to you.'

Kitty hoped for a moment that he was talking to Clara, but his fury was so obviously concentrated on her that at last she rose and said meekly,—

'Yes, Charles.'

'You will find a writing-block by the telephone in the hall. Please leave your address there.'

'Yes, Charles.'

With that she left the room. Charles and Clara were too much for her. All her venom trickled away in a thin stream of dread as she felt the gathering rage in the two of them. At the same time she had some exultation in having produced a storm so much beyond her own capacity.

'You did not tell me,' said Clara, when Kitty had gone.

'Honestly, honestly I had forgotten.'

'Forgotten! You did not tell me. You did not need her to come into this house to remember.'

'No.'

'What do you mean, then? You had forgotten?'

'Honestly, I never thought of it until one day when I met her in the street.'

'Does everybody know?'

'Yes. I don't conceal these things.'

'You concealed it from me, from me, from me....'

'Yes. I never thought of it. She'd gone out of my life years ago.'

'Have many women gone out of your life?'

He blushed.

'A good many.... I never meant to conceal it. Truly I didn't. I just didn't mention it.... You were so happy, chicken; so was I. I hadn't been happy before—not like that.'

'She can ruin us.... Do you know that? She has only to go up to the nearest policeman and ruin us. Do you know that?'

'She won't.... She'd never dare.'

'She would.... I'm young. That's the unpardonable thing in a woman....'

'I don't understand,' said Charles, sitting down suddenly. And quite perceptibly he did not understand that any one, man or woman, could deliberately hurt another.

'But you *must* understand,' she cried. 'You must understand.... You must protect yourself.'

'How can I?'

'She is your wife. You must give her what she wants.'

'Money? Oh, yes.'

'You fool,' said Clara, in exasperation, 'you've married me. If she moves at all you will be ruined. You will be sent to prison.'

'Do you want to get out of it?' he asked.

'I? No.... I want to protect you.... Oh, it's my fault. It's my fault I thought I could help you. I thought I could help you.... I could have helped you if only you had told me.... You must have known. You couldn't imagine that you could come back to London and not be——'

'But I did,' he said. 'I never thought of it. I never do think of anything except in terms of my work.... I'll tell Clott to see to it.'

Clara clenched her fists until her nails dug into the palms of her hands.

'I shall have to leave you,' she said at last. 'I shall have to leave you.'

She pulled off her wedding-ring

'Perhaps I'd better go away,' he muttered at last very slowly. 'It's a pity. Everything was going so well. Lord Verschoyle is deeply interested. He has two hundred thousand a year.'

Clara laughed at him.

'He is willing to sit on my committee.'

'Does he know?'

'No.'

'But can't you see that these people ought to know.'

'No. What has it got to do with my work?'

'To you nothing. To them everything. They can't support you if they know——'

'But they don't know.'

'You are in that woman's hands. So am I. You can't expect me to live upon her sanction.'

This was a new aspect of the matter to Charles, who had never admitted the right of any other person to interfere in his affairs. It hurt him terribly as it slowly dawned upon him that the miserable Kitty had behind her the whole force of the law.

'Oh, good God!' he said. 'I'm a criminal. Oh, good God! This is serious.'

'I'm glad you realise it at last,' said she.

He broke down and wept, and began to tumble out the whole ridiculous story of his life; his perpetual disappointment: his terror of being bound down to anything except the work in which he felt so free, so wholly master of himself and his destiny; his delight in at last finding in her a true companion who, unlike all other women, allowed him to be something more than her possession.

'I'm afraid,' he said in the end, 'that I have never understood women.'

'Leave it to me.' Poor Clara felt that if she tried to explain any more her head would burst.

He looked up at her gratefully and was at once happy again.

'It was my fault,' said Clara. 'It wouldn't have happened if I'd thought about life at all. But it was so wonderful being with you and making your work come to life that I never thought about the rest.... I never looked at it from the woman's point of view, as, being a woman, I ought to have done.... I think the shock has made me a woman.... I don't think anything will ever make you a man.'

Charles gaped at her, but was not the least bit hurt. He did not particularly want to be a man as manhood is generally understood.

'Yes,' he said, 'Lord Verschoyle is deeply interested, and he has two hundred thousand a year.'

'Wait a moment,' replied Clara, 'I'll go and see if she has left her address.'

She ran downstairs, but Kitty had left no address. As Clara, considering the matter, decided that meant either that she intended to make trouble or that she had good reason for waiting before she made it.

When she returned, Charles was lover-like in his gratitude, but she repulsed him, told him that he must get on with his designs for *The Tempest* and she would see what could be done about his troubles. For the present, for a little while at all events, she proposed to leave him and to stay with Julia Wainwright.

'I may have to tell her,' she said, 'but I don't think so.... I won't let this woman ruin you, Charles.'

'I have hurt you far more than I have hurt her,' he said miserably. 'I suppose things will never be the same. You'll always feel that I am keeping things from you....'

'No. No. I know that is all that matters.... It is just the law that is somehow wrong, giving advantage to any one who is mean enough to take it.... But women *are* mean.'

'Not you.'

'No. I do understand you, Charles, but I'm so hurt. I'm so tired I don't think I can stand much more.'

'I'll do anything you want.'

'Then leave it to me.... The chief thing is your work, Charles. That is all of you that matters.'

This was entirely Charles's view of himself, and, as he could not see, yet, the effect of the intrusion of Kitty upon the brave girl who had so childishly accepted his childishness he was unperturbed and free from all anxiety.... So far his new career in London had been a triumphant success, and it seemed to him incredible that it could be checked by such a trifle as a forgotten wife. He thought of the money that should come from the Imperium: money meant power, power meant the removal of all disagreeable obstacles from his path. He licked his lips.... England understood money and nothing else. He would talk to England in her own language and when he had caught her attention he would speak his own.... Things were going so splendidly: a man like himself was not going to be upset by trifles. He had worked in exile for so long: surely, surely he would be able to reap his reward.

Clara meanwhile was shocked almost out of her youth. She did not weep. There were no tears in her eyes in which there slowly gathered a fierce expression of passionate pain. The bloom of youth was on her cheeks, upon her lips, in all her still unformed features, but in her eyes suddenly was the knowledge of years, concentrated, tyrannous, and between this knowledge and her will there was set up a remorseless conflict, from which she found relief only in a new gaiety and love of fun.

It was impossible to discuss the matter any further with Charles, and without a word to him she went away to Miss Wainwright's flat. That good creature took her in without a word, without even a mute curiosity. People's troubles were their own affair, and she knew that they needed to be alone with them. She gave Clara her bedroom and absented herself as much as possible, and kept Freeland out of the way.

The flat was luxuriously but monstrously furnished. Its frank, opulent ugliness was a relief to the girl after the rarefied atmosphere of aesthetics in which for three years she had lived with Charles, upon whom all her thoughts were still concentrated. Of herself she had no thought. It did not concern her what she was called: wife or mistress. She was Clara Day and would remain so whatever happened to her. She had forced Charles to marry her in order to protect him and to help him, and she had brought him into danger of imprisonment.... It was perfectly true; Charles could not protect himself because he could not learn that others were not as kindly as himself. He

had been trapped into marriage with that vulgar and venomous woman. He could not speak of it because he loathed it so much.... She found excuses for him, for herself she sought none, and at the back of all her thoughts was her firm will that he should succeed. Yes, she thought, it was a good thing to leave him for a while. She had been with him too much, too near him.

It was a great comfort to be with Julia and Freeland, that unreal Romeo and Juliet of middle age. They were very proud of her, and elated to have her with them, took her everywhere, introduced her to all their friends, and insisted upon her being photographed for the Press, and in due course she had the shock of seeing her own features, almost more than life-size, exhibited to the hurrying crowds on the station-platforms. She was called Clara Day, Sir Henry Butcher's youngest and prettiest recruit. From the shy, studious little girl who sat close and, if possible, hidden during rehearsals, she found that she had become in the estimation of the company one of themselves. It was known that she had had lunch alone with Sir Henry, and the publication of her photograph sealed her young reputation. With the interest of the Chief, and influence in the Press, it was accepted that she would go far. That she was Mrs Charles Mann was whispered, for apparently she only had been ignorant of the impediment.

She apprehended the situation instinctively. Her mind recoiled from it. She felt trapped. Whichever way she moved she would injure him.... She ought to have kept quietly in the background, and let him go his own way. By forcing him into the theatre he and his affairs were exposed to the glaring light of publicity through her own impetuous ambition for him.

Soon she was in an intolerable agony. She wrote to Charles every day, and saw him occasionally, but was tortured every moment with the idea that her mere presence was injurious to him, and might call down an attack from the jealous Kitty at any moment. On the other hand, at any moment some journalist might seize on the story of her arrival in London with Charles, and publish the fact of their marriage.... She stayed on with Julia, and let the days go by until at last she felt that it was unfair to her kind friends. One night, therefore, after the theatre, she went into Julia's bedroom, and sat perched at the end of her bed, with her knees tucked under her chin, and said,—

'I'm not Charles's wife, Julia.'

'I know that,' replied the kind creature.

'But I *am* married to him.'

'Good God!' Julia sat up and clasped her hand to her capacious bosom.... 'Not a ceremony!'

'Yes. In an office near the Strand.'

'My dear child, my dear, dear child,' Julia began to weep. 'It's ... it's ... it's ...'

'I know what it is,' said Clara, setting her jaw. 'I don't know what to do.'

'You must never see him again.'

'But I must. I *am* married to him inside me. He can't do anything without me. I've made him come over here....'

'Didn't you know?'

'I knew nothing except that I loved him.'

'But people can't love like that.'

'I do.'

'He ran away from all that—and there were other things.... Oh, my dear, dear child, have you nobody belonging to you?'

'Only Charles. And I've hurt him.'

'What does he say?'

'He doesn't seem to realise....'

'I'd like to thrash him within an inch of his life.... The only thing to be thankful for is that you are not married to him. Not realise, indeed! He walked out of his marriage like a man bilking his rent.'

'He is an artist. His work is more important to him than anybody.'

Julia wept and wailed. 'The scoundrel! The scoundrel! The blackguard!'

'I won't have you calling him names. I won't have it. I won't have it,' cried Clara, her feelings finding vent in an outburst of temper. 'And you're not to tell a soul, not even Freeland. I won't have anybody interfering. I will handle this myself because I know more about it than anybody

else.... It doesn't help me at all to hear you abusing Charles. It only hurts me.... I've made a mistake, and I am going through with it.'

'But you can't live with him.'

'You live with Freeland.'

'Yes. But we're not married, so nobody worries; at least I am married, so is Freeland. That makes it all right. If people are married it is different.'

The complications of the position were beyond Julia's intelligence, and she began to laugh hysterically. Clara laughed, too, but from genuine amusement. The world certainly did look very funny from the detachment now forced upon her: deliciously funny, and Charles appeared in her thoughts as a kind of Harlequin dancing through the world, peering into the houses where people were captive, tapping the doors with his wand so that they opened, but no one never came out.

'I'll take you to my lawyer,' said Julia, at last, with a fat sob.

'I want no lawyers,' snapped Clara defiantly. 'Charles hates that woman and she knows it. She won't try to get him back.'

'Yes. But she won't stand you're being with him.'

'Then I'll live alone, and help Charles in my own way.'

'Help yourself first, lovey; then you can help other people.'

'I don't believe it. If you help yourself, you are kept so busy doing it that you don't know the other people are there.'

Of course Julia told Freeland, and in the morning he came tapping at Clara's door. She admitted him. His rather faded, handsome face wore a very serious expression, more serious indeed than was warranted either by the feeling in his heart or the thought in his head. It was a very serious situation, and he had assumed the appropriate manner.... Clara had slept soundly, and her fund of healthy good spirits made it possible for her to regard the whole complication as, in itself, rather superficial. The sun was shining in upon the mirror of her dressing-table, upon her silver brushes, upon the portrait of Julia in a silver frame, and upon the new frock which had come only the day before from the dressmaker. With the sun shining, and the eager thought of Charles in her heart, Clara could have no anxiety. No problem was insoluble, no obstacle, she believed, could be irresistible. Therefore she smiled as Freeland came in treading more heavily than his wont. He stood and looked down at her.

'It's a bad business, kid,' he said, 'a bad, bad business.'

'Is it?'

'He has ruined your life. I feel like shooting him.'

'That wouldn't help me.'

'Can't you see how serious it is? You're neither married nor unmarried.'

'Can't I be just Clara Day?'

Freeland was rather taken aback. He was used to Julia's taking her cue from him. If a woman does not take the line proposed by the man in a situation, a scene, where is he? And, in fact, Freeland did not know where he was. His life had proceeded fairly smoothly from scene to scene and he was not used to being pulled up.

'No, no, kid,' he protested. 'It is too ghastly. Your position is impossible. Charles, damn him, can't protect you. The world is hard and cruel.... A man can play the lone hand, but I never heard of its being done by a woman: never.'

'I'm going to see Charles through,' said Clara, 'and you'll see how we shall make this old London of yours wake up.'

'But if there's a scandal....?'

'There shan't be.... And if there is: well ... well...'

Freeland in his turn began to weep. Clara seemed to him so pathetic, so innocent, so oblivious of all the hard facts of the world. She was like a wild bird, flying in ecstasy, flying higher and higher in the pain of her song. Indeed she was a most touching sight lying there in her innocence, full of faith, conscious of danger, busy with wary thoughts, but so eager, vital, and confident that all her belief in Charles and her love for him were based in the deeper and stronger forces of life.... She was roused to battle, and she was profoundly aware that the law and the other devices of society were contrived wholly to frustrate those deeper, stronger forces.... Freeland's sentimental sympathy seemed to her in her happy morning mood weak and

irrelevant, yet charming and pathetic. He regarded her as a little girl and was entirely unconscious of all the passionate knowledge in her which moved so far and so swiftly beyond his capacity.

'Anything either of us can do,' he said, 'we shall do, always.' He stooped and took her in his arms and kissed her, and large tears fell upon her cheek. Tears came easily to these people: to Clara they came not. Indeed she rather exulted in her peril, which destroyed for her once and for all the superficiality of the life into which she had plunged in order to help Charles to conquer his kingdom, which was worlds away from this world of law and pretence, of spurious emotions and easy tears.

'I can't think how Charles could have done it,' said Freeland, drying his eyes.

'I made him,' said Clara, her eyes dancing with fun and mischief.

VI

BIRDS AND FISHES

For the time being it seemed that the superfluous Kitty had disappeared from the scene. She made no sign, and no attempt was made to trace her. Clara knew perfectly well that she was somewhere in the West End, but in that small crowded area it was possible to avoid meeting. People quickly fell into a groove and lived between a certain theatre, a certain restaurant, and home, and the light theatre was almost completely severed from the theatre which took itself so seriously. The legitimate stage had nothing to do with the bastard frivolity of the houses whose appeal was based on lingerie, pretty faces, and shapely limbs.

As for Charles, he was once again oblivious. He visited Clara at the flat, and had a painful scene with Freeland, who lashed out at him, rolled out a number of hard words, such as 'blackguard,' 'selfish beast,' etc., etc., but was nonplussed when Charles, not at all offended, said quietly,—

'Have you finished?'

'No. What do you propose to do about it? The poor child has no people. Julia and I are father and mother to her. In fact, I regard her as my adopted daughter.'

'I should always let her do exactly as she wished,' said Charles.

'Will you leave her alone then?'

'Certainly.'

Freeland regarded that as a triumph, but Clara was furious with him for interfering, and she scolded him until he promised that in future he would not say a word.

'What are you going to do?' he asked.

'I need a holiday from Charles,' she said—a new idea to Freeland, whose conception of love was besotted devotion—'and I am going to live alone for a time.'

Out she went, and before the day was done she had found a furnished apartment in the dingy region of narrow streets behind Leicester Square, and for a time she was entirely absorbed in this new acquisition. It was her own, her very own. It was at the top of the house, and looked out over roofs and chimneys westward so that she had the London sunset for comfort and companionship: more than enough, sweeter intimacy than any she had yet found among human beings, whose shallow business and fussy importance always hurt and exasperated her.... More clearly than ever she knew that there was only Charles and his work that mattered to her at all. She saw him occasionally and knew that he was entirely happy. He wrote to her every day and his plans were maturing famously. Lord Verschoyle was more and more interested, and as his lordship's interest grew so there waxed with it Charles's idea of his immense wealth. That worried Clara, who wanted her genius to prove himself in order to command and not to crave support. But Charles was elated with the success of his advertising campaign, and at the growth of his prestige among the artists.... 'Such a combination has never been known. We shall simply overwhelm the public.'

Clara's answer to this was to see that his relations with Sir Henry Butcher were not neglected. The explosion produced by Kitty's intervention had split their efforts, so that Charles was now working through Lord Verschoyle, she through Sir Henry Butcher, and once again she was embarked upon a battle with Charles for the realisation of his dreams—not upon paper, which perfectly satisfied him—but in terms of life in which alone she could feel that her existence

was honourable. She kept a tight enough hold of Charles to see that he worked at *The Tempest*, but, as she was no longer with him continually, she could not check his delighted absorption in his committee. This was properly and duly constituted. It had a chairman, Professor Laverock, and Mr Clott acted also as its secretary in an honorary capacity, his emoluments from Charles being more than sufficient for his needs. It met regularly once a month in studios and drawing-rooms. The finest unofficialised brains in London were gathered together, and nervous men eyed each other suspiciously and anxiously until Charles appeared, with Mr Clott fussing and moving round him like a tug round a great liner. His presence vitalised the assembly; the suppressed idealism in his supporters came bubbling to the surface. Poets whose works were ignored by the great public, musicians whose compositions were ousted by Germans, Russians, Frenchmen, and Poles from the concert-rooms of London, dramatists whose plays were only produced on Sunday evenings, art critics who had acclaimed Charles's exhibition, all in his presence were conscious of a solidarity proof against all jealousy and disappointment; Charles, famous in Paris, Berlin, Moscow, New York, moved among them like a kindling wind.

He would arrive with his arms full of papers, while Mr Clott in a little black bag carried the essential documents—minute-book, agenda, suggestions, plans. For some months the Committee accomplished nothing but resolutions to invite and co-opt other members, but it seemed impossible to lure any really successful person into the net. No actor-manager, no Royal Academician, no poet with a healthy circulation could be found to give practical expression to his sympathy, though admiration for Mr Mann's work and the high reputation he had won for British Art on the Continent oozed from them all in letters of great length, which were read to the Committee until its members, most of them rather simple souls, were bewildered.

The accretion of Lord Verschoyle made a great difference. He attended in person, a shy, elegant young man, educated at Eton, and in the Guards for the gentle art of doing nothing. He owned a large area of London, and his estates were managed by a board which he was not even expected to attend, and he was a good young man. He wanted to spend money and to infuriate his trustees, but he did not know how to do it. Women bored him. He had a yacht, but loathed it, and kept it in harbour, and only spent on it enough money to keep it from rusting away. He maintained a stable, but would not bet or attend any other meeting than Ascot. He had some taste in art, but only cared for modern pictures, which he could buy for fifty or a hundred pounds. Indeed he was much too nice for his altogether exceptional opportunities for wasting money, for he loathed vulgarity, and the only people who could tell him how to waste his wealth—stable-touts, art-dealers, women of the West End—were essentially vulgar, and he could not endure their society.... He had five houses, but all he needed was an apartment of three rooms, and he was haunted and made miserable by the idea, not without a fairly solid foundation, that young women and their mammas wished to marry him for his money.... He longed to know a young woman who had no mamma, but none ever came his way. Society was full of mammas, and of ladies eager to push the fortunes of their husbands and lovers. He was turned to as a man of power, but in his heart he knew that no human being was ever more helpless, more miserably at the mercy of his trustees, agents, and servants.... He had been approached many times by persons interested in plays, theatres, and schemes, but being that rare and unhappy creature, a rich man with good taste, he had avoided them as hotly as the mammas of Mayfair and Belgravia.

He met Charles at his exhibition and was introduced to him. Charles at once bellowed at him at the top of his voice on the great things that would be achieved through the realisation of his dreams, and Lord Verschoyle had in his society the exhilarated sense of playing truant, and wanted more of it. He was hotly pursued at the moment by Lady Tremenheer, who had two daughters, and he longed ardently to disgrace himself, but so perfect was his taste that he could not do it—in the ordinary way. Charles was outrageous, but so famous as to carry it off, and Verschoyle seized upon the great artist as the way of escape, well knowing that art ranked with dissipation in the opinion of his trustees. With one stone he could kill all his birds. He promised by letter, being most careful to get his wicked indiscretion down in writing, his whole-hearted support of Charles's scheme.

Charles thereupon drew up his scheme. Verschoyle's wealth disposed of the most captious member of his committee, whose meetings now became more awful and ceremonious than ever. Even so much assembled intellect could not resist the wealth that through the generations had been gathered up to surround the gentle personality of Horace Biningham, Lord Verschoyle, who smiled benignantly upon the strange company and, all unconscious of the devastating effect upon them of his money, was most humbly flattered to be in the presence of so many distinguished persons.

The tenth meeting of the committee was arranged to be the most critical. Charles was to read and expound the scheme upon which he had been at work for years. The meeting was to be held at his own house, and for this occasion only he implored Clara to be present as hostess, and so eager was she to share in the triumph of that side of his activities that she consented and was the only woman present. With Professor Laverock in the chair, Mr Clott read the minutes of the last meeting, upon which, as nothing had happened, there was no comment. Clara sat in a corner by the door and looked from face to face, trying in vain to find in any something of the fire and eagerness that was in her Charles's, who, radiant and bubbling over with confidence, sat at a little table in the centre of the room with his papers in front of him, two enormous candles on either side, and his watch in his hand.

After formalities, Professor Laverock called upon Mr Mann to read his scheme to the

committee.... Rarely can a room have contained so much eager idealism, rarely can so many mighty brains have been keyed up to take their tune from one.

Charles smoothed out his paper, shook back his hair, arranged the cuffs which he always wore in his desire to be taken for an English gentleman. His hearers settled themselves in their chairs. He began:—

'Gentlemen, we are all here concerned to make the theatre a temple of art, always open with a welcome to every talent, from that of the highest and most creative vision to that of the most humble and patient craftsman's life.'

'Ah!' some one sighed contentedly.

'We cannot expect such a theatre either from actors or from commercial persons who would be much better engaged in selling boots or soap.... In Germany art is honoured. Nietzsche, whom I acknowledge as my compeer, is to be commemorated with an enormous stadium upon a hill. In England we have turned away from the hill-top and are huddled together in the valleys until beauty is lost and dreams are but aching memories....'

Clara was irritated by this preamble. It was too much like the spirit of Sir Henry Butcher. If only Charles had consulted her she would have cut out this ambitious bombast, and brought him down to practical detail.

'My proposal is that we should erect upon one of three suitable sites in London a theatre which shall be at once a school and a palace of art. There will be one theatre on the German model, and an outdoor theatre on the plan of an arena in Sicily of which I have here sketches and plans.'

'Is that quite suitable in the English climate?' asked Adolph Griffenberg, a little Jewish painter.

'The disabilities of the English climate are greatly exaggerated,' said Charles. 'There could be protection from wind and rain, if it were thought necessary. There will be attached to the indoor theatre an experimental stage to which I of course shall devote most of my energies; then schoolrooms, a kitchen, a dining-room, a dancing-room, a music-room, a wardrobe, three lifts and two staircases.'

'Isn't this too detailed for our present purpose?' asked Griffenberg.

'I merely wish to show that I am entirely practical,' retorted Charles. 'There will be every modern appliance upon the stage, several inventions of my own, and an adjustable proscenium. The staff will consist of myself, a dozen instructors in the various arts of the theatre, and a larger number of pupils, who will be promoted as they give evidence of talent and skill in employing it.'

So far attention had been keen and eager. Charles's happy vision of a marble temple lit with the inward sun of vision and rosy with youth had carried all before it. He warmed to his task, talked on as the candles burned low, and at last came to the financial aspect of his proposal. Griffenberg leaned forward, and Clara watched him apprehensively.

'I have estimated the cost as follows,' said Charles, now confident that he had his hearers with him. 'I have put my estimate as low as possible, so that we may know our minimum:—

The Outdoor Theatre	£6,000
The Indoor Theatre	£15,000
To Machinery	£4,000
To Salaries	£1,500
My Own Salary	£5,000
Wardrobe	£600
Ground rent	Nominal
Musicians and music	£600
Paint, materials, etc.	£400
Food for the birds and fishes . . .	£25

There was a dead silence. One or two men smiled. Others stared. Others pulled their noses or smoothed their hair. Griffenberg laughed harshly and said,—

'Excuse me, Mr Mann. I didn't quite catch that last item.'

Charles who was entirely unaware of the changed atmosphere looked up and repeated,—

'Food for the birds and fishes.... There must be beautiful birds flying in the outdoor theatre. In the courtyard there must be fish-ponds with rare fish....'

'We are not proposing to build a villa of Tiberius,' snapped Griffenberg, who was deeply wounded. 'I cannot agree to a scheme which includes birds and fishes.'

Clara was bristling with fury against Charles for being so childish, and against Griffenberg

for taking advantage of him. She knew that Charles was in an ecstasy, and unable to cope with any practical point they chose to raise. It would have been fair for Griffenberg to take exception to his estimates, but not to the birds and fishes.... Her sense of justice was so outraged that to keep herself from intervening she slipped out of the room and gave vent to her fury in the darkness of the passage.

The worst happened. The scheme was forgotten; the birds and fishes were remembered.... Griffenberg asked rather insolently if Mr Mann proposed to publish the scheme as it stood, and Charles, who did not detect the insolence, said that he certainly intended to publish the scheme and had indeed already sent a copy to the Press Association.

'As your own or as the Committee's scheme?'

Mr Clott intervened,—

'I made it quite clear that the scheme was Mr Mann's own, and Mr Mann sent with it what I may say is a very beautiful description of his theatre as it will be in being.'

'Theatres in the air,' said some one, and all, just a little ashamed, though with a certain bravado of geniality to cover their shame, rose to go.

As they came out of the room Clara darted up the stairs and heard their remarks as they departed. 'Birds and fishes.' ... 'Extraordinary man.' ... 'Fairy tale.' ... 'Damned impudence.'

Charles, still unmindful of any change, moved among them thanking them warmly for their support and explaining that if he had been somewhat long in reading it was because he had wished to leave no room for misunderstanding.

No one stayed but an Irish poet, who had been delighted with the words, birds and fishes, emerging like a poem from the welter of so much detail, and Verschoyle, a little uneasy, but entranced by Charles's voice and what seemed to him his superb audacity. They three stood and talked themselves into oblivion of the world and its narrow ways, and Charles was soon riding the hobby-horse of his theory of Kingship and urging Verschoyle to interest the Court of St James's in Art.

Clara joined them, listened for a while, and later detached his lordship from the other two, who talked hard against each other, neither listening, both hammering home points. She took Verschoyle into a corner and said,—

'It was very unfair of Mr Griffenberg to catch Charles out on the birds and fishes. They're very important to him.'

'That's what I like about him,' said Verschoyle. 'Things are important to him. Nothing is important to the rest of us.'

'Some of them will resign from the committee,' said Clara. 'I hope you won't. It is a great pity, because Charles does mean it so thoroughly.'

Verschoyle screwed in his eye-glass and held his knee and rocked it to and fro. He was shrewd enough to see that if he resigned the whole committee would break up, and he knew that this dreadful eventuality was in Clara's mind also. He liked Charles's extravagance: it made him feel wicked, but also he was kind and could not bring himself to hurt Clara. He had never in his life felt that he was of the slightest importance to any one. Clara felt that sense stirring in him and she fed it; let him into the story of their struggles and the efforts she had made to bring her idealist to London, and urged upon him the vital importance of Charles's work.

'They're all jealous of him,' she said, 'all these people who have never been heard of outside London. It was just like them to fasten on a thing like that.'

Verschoyle laughed.

'I like the idea of birds and fishes in London,' he said. 'I think we need them.... Now, if it were you, Mrs Mann'—for he had been so introduced to her—'I would back you through everything.'

'It is me,' said Clara. 'It always is a woman. If it were not for me we should not be in London now.'

'You must bring him to dinner with me.'

Clara accepted in her eagerness to save the situation without realising that she had compromised herself.

'You will forgive my saying it,' added Verschoyle, 'but it hurts me to hear you speak of yourself as a woman. You are only a child and I hate women.'

'So do I,' said Clara, all her anxiety now allayed. With Verschoyle for her friend she did not care how soon the committee was dissolved. She had always hated the committee, for, as her grandfather used to say, a committee is a device by which the incompetent check the activities of

the competent.... She liked Verschoyle. He was a lonely little man and she thought whimsically that only lonely people could swallow the birds and fishes which are so necessary as the finishing touch to the artist's vision.

'I must be going now,' she said to her companion's surprise.

'Can't I take you in my car?' he asked, concealing his astonishment at her speaking of a home elsewhere. She consented, and he took her back to her rooms, leaving Charles and the Irish poet still rhapsodising in a somewhat discordant duet.

VII

SUPPER

Idealists must certainly be added to the drunkards and children over whom a specially benign deity watches: a flood of disaster by sea and land gave a plentiful crop of news and made it impossible for the papers to publish Charles Mann's scheme. His committee's dread of being made publicly ridiculous evaporated, and, as Lord Verschoyle did not resign, no other member did, and Griffenberg simply sent in a letter of protest and announced that he was too busy to take any more active part in the proceedings. He went away and denounced the theatre as a vulgar institution, which no artist could enter without losing his soul. He said this publicly in a newspaper and produced one of those delightful controversies which in the once happy days of unlimited advertisement provided an opportunity for mutual recrimination upon an impersonal basis.

Verschoyle promised Charles thirty thousand pounds if he could raise another similar amount, and Charles regarded himself as worth thirty thousand already, raised Mr Clott's salary, and condescended with so much security to begin really to work at *The Tempest*.

Clara, who was still playing small parts at the Imperium, found to her dismay that Sir Henry had rather cooled towards the Mann production and was talking of other plays, a huge American success called *The Great Beyond*, and a French drama of which he had acquired the rights some few years previously. This was really alarming, for she knew that if she could not engage Charles speedily he would simply fling away from the theatre and devote himself, unsupported except by Verschoyle, who was by no means a certain quantity, to his airy schemes. Already he was beginning to be swayed by letters from well-meaning persons in the provinces, who urged him to found another Bayreuth in the Welsh Hills or the Forest of Arden.... Give Charles a hint and he would construct an imaginary universe! If she could only stop him advertising, he would not be exposed to the distracting bombardment of hints and suggestions which was opened upon him with every post, especially after he announced with his usual bland indiscretion his association with the owner of a fashionable part of the Metropolis.

Verschoyle did not object. It horrified his trustees and after a time, growing bolder, he was much in Charles's company, and found him extremely useful as a bogey to frighten away the mammas who had made his life hideous ever since his Eton days, when one of his aunts had horrified him by referring to one of his cousins, a child of fifteen, as his 'dear little wifie.' ... Further, by seeing much of Charles, he could see more of Clara without compromising her or himself.

Now in the world of the theatre there never is but always may be money. It is always going to be made, so that everybody associated with it has credit sustained by occasional payment. Clara realised this very early in her career. She understood finance, because her grandfather had discussed his affairs with her exactly as if she were his partner, and she had had to keep a tight hand on his extravagance; and she quickly understood that in the theatre money must be spent always a little faster than it can be made to keep the current of credit flowing. She also realised that Sir Henry Butcher spent it a great deal faster, and was cool and warm towards the various projects laid before him according as they made payment possible.... He had watched Charles Mann's increase of fame with a jealous interest, but with a shrewdly expert eye waited for the moment of capitalisation to come before he committed himself to the new-fangled ways of dressing the stage, these damned Greek tragedies, plays in curtains, German toy sets, and Russian flummery in which painted blobs stood for trees and clouds. To Sir Henry a tree was a tree, a cloud a cloud, and he liked nothing better than to have real rabbits on the stage, if possible to out-Nature Nature.... At the same time he knew that the public was changing. It was becoming increasingly difficult to produce an instantaneous success. The theatre did not stand where it had done in popular esteem, and its personalities had no longer the vivid authority they had once enjoyed. When the Prime Minister visited the Imperium, it was rather Sir Henry than the Prime Minister who was honoured: a sad declension, for Prime Ministers come and go, but a great actor rules for ever as sole lessee and manager of an institution as familiar to the general mind as the House of Commons. Prime Ministers had come and gone, they had in turn accepted

Sir Henry's kind offer of a box for the first night, but latterly Prime Ministers had gathered popularity and actor-managers had lost it, so great had been the deterioration of the public mind since the introduction of cheap newspapers, imposing upon every public character the necessity of a considerable waste of energy in advertising.... In the old days, a great man's advertising was done for him in acknowledgment of his greatness. Sir Henry was uneasy, could not shake off the gathering gloom, and a deep-seated conviction that Lady Butcher had made the fatal mistake of his career by devoting herself so exclusively to the front of the house and social drapery, bringing him into intimate contact with such persons as Prime Ministers, Dukes, and Attorney-Generals.... The public had been admitted behind the scenes. The mystery was gone. The theatre, even the Imperium had lost its spell. Nothing in it was sacred; not even rehearsals, which were continually interrupted by journalists, male and female, elegant young men and women who were friends and acquaintances of his family, dressmakers. 'Ah! Teresa! Teresa!' sighed Sir Henry, gazing at the portrait of that lady. 'It needs your touch, your charm, the quick insight into the health of the theatre which only comes to those who have been born in it.'

Soon the Imperium would close for a short holiday, after a shockingly bad season, and its manager had to make up his mind as to his new production. Mr Gillies was all for safety and economy, and for postponing any adventure to the Spring, but Sir Henry said,—

'The fate of the whole year is decided in October. The few people who matter come back from Karlsbad and Scotland cleaned up and scraped, and it is then that you make your impression. The Spring is too late. We must have something new.'

'We've got nothing new.'

'This fellow Mann.'

'But! He's mad. If he walked into the Club half the men would walk out of it.'

'He has made himself felt.'

'Yes. But in the wrong way.'

'The wrong way is often the right way in the end.'

'You can't have him in the theatre, Chief, after the way he has talked about us, as though none of us knew our business.'

'He might say so if he saw our balance-sheet,' said Sir Henry, who loved nothing so much as teasing his loyal subordinates. 'We've nothing but this melodrama of Halford Bunn's in which I should have to play the Pope.'

'Well, you were a great success as a Cardinal, Chief.'

'Hm! Hm! Yes.' Sir Henry began to live again through the success of *The Cardinal's Niece*, but also he remembered the horrible time he had had at rehearsals with Mr Halford Bunn who would get so drunk with his own words that any acting which distracted attention from them drove him almost into hysterics.

Sir Henry laughed.

'Bunn or Mann.... Said Mr Mann to Mr Bunn, "I hope you've got a record run." Said Mr Bunn to Mr Mann, "You, sir, are but an also ran."'

'Ha! ha! ha!' laughed the manager.

'He! he! he!' laughed Sir Henry, and they parted without having solved their problem, though the impishness in Sir Henry made him long to infuriate both Bunn and Mann by a merger of his contracts with the two of them.... Oh! dear. Oh, dear, authors had always been trial enough, but if artists were going to begin to thrust their inflated egoism into the machinery of the theatre then the life of its manager would become unbearable.... Sir Henry liked to drift and to make sudden and surprising decisions.

In this case the decision was made for him—by Clara. It had become one of his chief pleasures to give her lunch in the Aquarium, as she called it, and to laugh with her over her vivid and comic impressions of London, and insensibly he had fallen in love with her, not as was his habit theatrically and superficially, but with an old man's passion for youth. It hurt him, plagued him, tortured him, because she never gave him an opening for flirtation, but kept his wits at full stretch and made him feel thirty again: and as he felt thirty he wanted to be thirty.... She never discussed her private affairs with him, but he knew that she lived alone. She baffled him, bewildered him, until he was often hard put to it not to burst into tears. So quick she was and she understood so well, had so keen an insight into character and the intrigue that went on all around her, that he marvelled at her innocence and sometimes almost hated her for it, and for her refusal to accept the position assigned to women in society. His blague, his bluff were useless with her. He had painfully to reveal to her his best, the kindly, tender-hearted, generous simpleton that at heart he was. Loving her, he could not help himself, and, loving her, he raged against her.

She would never allow him to visit her in her rooms. That was a privilege which she reserved for Verschoyle. Her rooms were her sanctuary, her refuge, the place where she could be simple and human, and be the untouched Clara Day who had lived in childish glee with her grandfather and most powerfully alone in her imagination with various characters, more real than any of the persons with whom she ever came in contact until she met Charles Mann.... He was never admitted to her rooms, nor was Sir Henry Butcher, in whom she had for the first time encountered the ordinary love of the ordinary sentimental male. This left her so unmoved that she detested it, with all its ridiculous parade of emotions, its stealthy overtures, its corrosive dishonesty, which made a frank interchange of thought and feeling impossible.... The thing had happened to her before, but she had been too young to realise it, or to understand to the full its essential possessiveness, which to her spirit was its chief offence.

She had to rebuke Sir Henry. One week she found her salary trebled. She returned the extra ten pounds to Mr Gillies, the manager, pointing out that she was doing the same work, small and unimportant, and that it was not fair to the other girls.

'The Chief believes in you, Miss Day. He doesn't want you to leave us.'

'This is the very kind of thing to drive me out.'

'You're not like other girls, Miss Day....' said Mr Gillies. 'Indeed, I often wonder what a young lady who wears her clothes as you do is doing in the theatre.'

Clara's expression silenced him, and she was enraged with the Chief for exposing her to such familiarity. She taxed Sir Henry with it, and he was quick to see his mistake, and so warmly pleaded that he had only meant it as a kindness that she could not but forgive him. He implored her to let him merit her forgiveness by making her a present of anything she desired; but she desired nothing.

'I'm at your feet,' he said, and he went down on his knees. 'In two or three years I will make a great actress of you. You shall be the great woman of your time.... A Spring day in the country with you would make me young as Romeo....'

'Please get up,' said Clara, 'and let us talk business. You promised early this year that you would do Charles Mann's *Tempest*.'

'Yes. I'm always making promises. One lives on promises. Life is a promise.... If I promise to do *The Tempest* will you come and stay with us in The Lakes in August? I want you to meet the Bracebridges; you ought to know the best people, the gay people, the aristocrats, the only people who know how to be amusing.'

This was getting further and further away from business, though Clara knew that it was impossible to keep Sir Henry to the point. She ignored his invitation and replied,—

'If you will do *The Tempest* I can get Lord Verschoyle to support it.'

Sir Henry was at once jealous. He pouted like a baby.

'I don't want Verschoyle or any other young cub to help you. *I* want to help you.... Verschoyle can't appreciate you. He can't possibly see you as you are, or as you are going to be.'

Clara smiled. Verschoyle had become her best friend, and with him she enjoyed a deep, quiet intimacy which the young gentleman preserved with exquisite tact and taste, delighting in it as he did in a work of art, or a good book, and appreciating fully that the girl's capacity for it was her rarest and most irresistible power.... Sir Henry was like a silly boy in his desire to impress on her that he alone could understand her.

He continued,—

'It seems so unnatural that you have no women friends other than old Julia.... An actress nowadays has her part to play in society.... You have brought new life into my theatre.'

'Then,' said Clara, 'let us do *The Tempest*.'

'But I don't want to do *The Tempest*.'

'Charles said you did.'

'We talked about it, but we are always talking in the theatre.... I would give up everything if you would only be a little kinder to me.'

Was this the great Sir Henry speaking? Clara saw that he was on the verge of a schoolboy outburst, perhaps a declaration, and she was never fonder of the man than in this moment of self-humiliation. He waited for some relaxation in her, but was met only with sallies. He rose, drew his hand over his eyes, and walked up and down the room sighing.

'At my age, to love for the first time.... It is appalling: it is tragic. To have made so great a position and to have nothing to offer you that you will accept.'

'Not even a rise in salary,' said Clara, a little maliciously, and she so hurt him that he collapsed in his attempt at heroics, and to win her at all costs said,—

'Yes, yes. I will do *The Tempest*. I can make Prospero a great part. I will do *The Tempest* if you will be Miranda; at least if you will be nothing else you shall be a daughter to me.'

'You had better ask Charles and Verschoyle to supper,' said Clara. 'And we can all talk it over. But I won't have Mr Gillies.'

'Ah! How Teresa hated that man.... Do you know that I sometimes think he has undone all the great work she did for me.'

Clara had no mind to discuss Mr Gillies. She had gained her point. She felt certain that a combination of Butcher, Charles, and Verschoyle was the most promising for her purpose.

'I hate Mann,' said Sir Henry. 'I hate him. He is a renegade. He loathes his own calling. He has turned his back on it....'

'When you know him you will love him.'

Sir Henry swung round and fixed his eyes on her.

'I live in dread,' he said, 'in dread for you. You have everything before you, everything, and then one day you will fall in love and your genius will be laid at the feet of some fool who will trample it under foot as a cow treads on a beautiful buttercup.'

Clara smiled. Sir Henry, from excessive familiarity with noble words, could never find the exact phrase.

The supper was arranged in the aquarium, which in Clara's honour was filled with banked up flowers, lilies, roses, delphiniums, and Canterbury bells.... Clara wore gray and green, and gray shoes with cross-straps about her exquisite ankles. She came with Verschoyle, who brought her in his car which he had placed at her disposal. Sir Henry was in a velvet evening suit of snuff colour, and he glared jealously at his lordship whom he regarded as an intending destroyer of Clara's reputation.

'I'm glad you're going to give Mann his chance,' said Verschoyle. 'Extraordinary fellow, most extraordinary.... Pity his life should be wasted, especially now that we are beginning to wake up to the importance of the theatre.'

Sir Henry winced.

'There *are* men,' he said, 'who have worked while others talked. Take this man Shaw, for instance. He talked for years. Then he comes out with plays which are all talk.'

'Ibsen,' said Verschoyle.

'Why should we on the English stage go on gloomily saying that there's something rotten in the state of Norway?.... I have run Shakespeare for more hundred nights than any man in the history of the British drama, and I venture to say that every man of eminence and every woman of beauty or charm has had at least a cigarette in this room.... Isn't that proof of the importance of the theatre?'

'It may be only proof of your personal charm, Sir Henry,' said Verschoyle, and Clara was pleased with him for that.... She enjoyed this meeting of her two friends. Verschoyle's breeding was the exactly appropriate set off to Sir Henry's flamboyance.

With the arrival of Charles, the grouping was perfect. He came in bubbling over with enthusiasm. His portfolio was under his arm, and he had in his hand a bundle of newspapers.

'Extraordinary news,' he said. 'The Germans in despair are turning the theatre into a circus. Their idea of a modern Hellenic revival. Crowds, horses, clowns.... Sophocles in a circus!'

'Horrible!' said Verschoyle. 'Horrible! We must do better than that, Sir Henry.'

'I *have* done better.'

Charles bent over Clara's hand and kissed it.

'I have been working hard,' he said. 'Very hard. My designs are nearly finished.... Verschoyle likes them.'

'I think them delightful,' said Verschoyle.

Supper was served. In tribute to Clara's charm, Verschoyle's wealth, and Charles's genius, it was exquisitely chosen—oysters, cold salmon, various meats, pastries and jellies, with sherry, champagne, port and liqueurs, ices and coffee.

Sir Henry and Charles ate enormously. Even in that they were in competition. They sat opposite each other, and their hands were constantly busy reaching over the table for condiments, bread, biscuits, olives, wine.... Verschoyle and Clara were in strong contrast to them, though both were enjoying themselves and were vastly entertained by the gusto of the great.

Sir Henry talked at Clara in a boyish attempt to dispossess Charles. He was at his most airily brilliant, and invented a preposterous story in which Mr Gillies, his manager, and Mr Weinberg, his musical director, were engaged in an intrigue to ruin Miss Julia Wainwright, as the one had a niece, the other a wife, aching to become leading lady at the Imperium.

'Julia,' he said, 'shall play Caliban. Why not? You shall play Ariel, Mann, and dear old Freeland shall be Ceres.... Let us be original. I haven't read *The Tempest* for a long time, but I dare say there's a part for you, Verschoyle.'

'No, thanks.'

'You could be one of the invisible spirits who eat the phantom supper.'

'You and Charles could do that very well,' said Clara, who felt that her plans would succeed. These three men were held together by her personality, and she meant them to unite for the purpose of forcing out those qualities in Charles which made her ready for every sacrifice, if only they could be brought to play their part in the life of his time.... As the wine and food took effect, all three men were in high spirits, and soon were roaring with laughter at the immense joke in which they all shared, the joke of pleasing the British public.

'It is the most wonderful game ever invented,' said Sir Henry. 'Millions and millions of people believing everything they are told. Shouting Hurrah! for fried fish if the hero of the moment says fried fish, and Hooray! for ice-cream when the next hero says ice-cream.... I tell you I could put on a play by Halford Bunn to-morrow, and persuade them for a few weeks that it was better than Shakespeare. Ah! you blame us for that, but the public is at fault always. The man who makes a fortune is the man who invents a new way of boring them.... We shall be like the French soon, where the only means of maintaining any interest in politics is by a scandal now and then.'

As they talked Clara felt more and more remote from them, and at moments found it difficult to believe that it was really she to whom all these amazing things had happened. She thought it must be the end. Here at one table were money, imagination, and showmanship, the three essentials of success, but the three men in whom they lived were talking themselves into ineffectiveness. Even Verschoyle had caught the fever and was talking, and she found herself thinking that the three of them, whom separately she could handle so well, were together too much for her.

They talked for hours, and she tried again and again vainly to steer them back to business. They would have none of it. Their tongues were loosed and they expressed their several discontents in malicious wit.

At last she left the table and took up Charles's portfolio. He sprang to his feet and snatched it away from her rather roughly and said,—

'I don't want to show them yet.'

'It is getting late, Charles,' she protested.

'In Moscow,' he said, 'a feast like this goes on for days.'

Sir Henry took advantage of the altercation to ascertain from Verschoyle that he was willing to back Mann's *Tempest* for at least an eight weeks' run. That was good enough for Sir Henry. He had no need to look at the drawings.... He was back again in his palmy days. He knew that Clara, like Teresa, would not let him make a fool of himself.

Clara saw this, and was very angry and sore. It was terrible to her that when she had hoped for an eagerness and gusto to carry through her project there should have been this declension upon money and food. After all, Shakespeare wrote *The Tempest* and his share in its production was greater than that of either Mann or Butcher. She had hoped they would discuss the play and bring into common stock their ideas upon it.

However, she laughed at herself for being so young and innocent. No doubt in their own time they would really tackle their problem, and, after all, in the world of men, from which women were and perhaps always would be excluded, money and food were of prime importance. All the same she was disappointed and could hardly conceal it.

'I haven't had such a good evening for twenty years,' said Sir Henry.

'Famous,' said Charles, returning to the table. Charles was astonished to find how much he liked Sir Henry, upon whose doings in his exile he had brooded bitterly.

Verschoyle said,—

'I'm only astonished that more men in my position don't go in for the theatre. There are so many of us and we can't think of anything better than racing and polo and big game.'

As they were all so pleased with themselves, Clara swallowed her chagrin, and more happily accepted their homage when Sir Henry toasted her as the presiding Muse of the Imperium.

She was suffering from the reaction from a fulfilled ambition. She had overcome Charles's reluctance to submit to the machinery of the theatre, and was herself now inspired with something of a horror of its immense power, which could absorb originality and force, and reduce individuals to helpless puppets. But she would not admit to herself that she might have been wrong, and that it were possibly better to have left Charles to fight his own way through.

No, no. Left to himself he would always be tripped up by his desire for birds and fishes and other such superfluities. Left to meet in their love of art he and Sir Henry would soon have been at loggerheads. In their love of food, they could discover each other's charm and forget their jealousy and suspicion of each other's aims.

VIII

SOLITUDE

Verschoyle swept aside her reluctance to accept gifts from him, and she allowed him to furnish her rooms for her upon condition that he never came there without her permission. He said,—

'Why shouldn't I have the pleasure of indulging my desire to give you everything in the world? People will talk! ... People talk anyhow in London. If we were seen walking together down Piccadilly, there would be talk. They will say I am going to marry you, but we know different.... Your way of living is exactly my ideal, absolute independence, peace, and privacy. We're rather alike in that. It seems so odd that we should be living with these people whose whole aim in life is publicity.'

They had many happy hours together reading and discussing the books which he bought for her by the armful at a shop in Charing Cross Road, where, open to the street, were piles of books almost blatantly subversive of society—Nietsche, Havelock Ellis, Shaw, Ibsen, Anarchist tracts, Socialist and Labour journals, R.P.A. cheap reprints, every sort and kind of book that in an ordinary shop would only be procured upon a special order.... It was a very fierce shop. Its woodwork was painted scarlet, and above the shelves in gilt letters were such names as Morris, Marx, Bakounin, Kropotkin, Lassalle, and mottoes such as 'The workers of the world have nothing to lose but their chains.'

It was Clara who discovered the shop in her wanderings through the West End, which she desired to know even to its remotest crannies, and its oddity seized her imagination when she discovered that for all its fierceness it was kept by a gentle little old Scotsman, who most ferociously desired the destruction of society, but most gently helped all who needed help and most wholly sympathised with all, and they were many, who turned to him for sympathy.... The frequenters of his shop were poor, mostly long-haired eaters of nuts, and drinkers of ideas. There were young men who hovered in the background of his shop arguing, chatting, filling in the time they had to spend away from their lodgings in the frequent intervals between their attempts to do work for which their convictions made them unfitted. They believed, as he did, in the nobility of work, but could find none that was not ignoble. It was his boast that he had no book in his shop in which he did not believe.

The beautiful and elegant young lady who walked into his shop one day astonished and delighted him with her radiance. She was the kind of accident that does not often happen to a humble Anarchist bookseller.

When she came again and again, he warmed to her, and recommended books, and gave her Prince Kropotkin's *Memoirs* as a present, at least he gave her the second volume, for he could not find the first.... He always hotly denied that books were stolen from his open shop, but admitted that they were sometimes 'borrowed' by his young friends.

The story of Kropotkin's escape from the fortress moved Clara deeply, and she read it to Verschoyle in her rooms.

'And that man is still alive,' she said, 'here in England, where we go round and round hunting fame and money.... He was like you, Verschoyle, in just such a position as you, but he found it intolerable and went to prison.'

'Ah! but that was in Russia, where it is easy to go to prison. If I tried and tried they wouldn't

send me. I'm too rich. They wouldn't do it. If I became an Anarchist, they would just laugh because they don't believe that society can ever be upset.'

'I'm quite sure I didn't go into that shop for nothing. Something is going to happen to me,' said Clara.

'I think quite enough has happened to you. Don't you? ... What a restless little creature you are! Here you are with everything at your feet, the greatest artist, the richest bachelor in London at your disposal, and you want something to happen to you.'

'I don't want it. I say that I feel it must come.

'You're before your time, my dear. That's what is the matter with you. Women aren't independent yet. They are still clinging to men. That is what I cannot stand about them. I should hate to have a woman clinging to my money. Still more should I hate to have one clinging to myself.'

'But you ought to marry. You would be happier.'

He shook his head and smiled,—

'You have made that impossible, Clara.'

'I?'

'Yes. If I found a girl like you who wanted to marry me I might consider it.... My aunts are furious.'

'With me?'

'Yes. You have made more of a stir than you can imagine. They tell me you are more wicked than Cleopatra, and yet you complain that nothing happens to you.'

She took him to the bookshop and introduced him to the bookseller, a little gray-bearded man in a tweed suit. Verschoyle liked him and asked him what he thought a man in his position ought to do.

'The man Jesus put you right years ago,' said the bookseller. 'Sell all that thou hast and give to the poor.'

'But I can't,' said Verschoyle. 'I'm only a *cestui que trust*.'

To both Verschoyle and Clara the bookshop was a place of escape, a holiday ground where they could play with ideas which to Verschoyle were a new kind of toy. With Mann there was always a certain strain for him, because Mann wanted something definite; but with the bookseller and his young friends, he was at his ease, for they were very like himself, without ambition, and outside all the press and hurry of society. Like himself they wanted nothing except to be amused, and like himself they hated amusement which entailed effort.

Clara, however, as usual took it seriously. The Kropotkin Memoirs had jolted her imagination, and she saw the young men of the bookshop as potential Kropotkins, people who stood upon the edge of an abyss of suffering and asked nothing better than to be engulfed in the world's misery.

The disturbance in her serenity was so great that for some weeks she shut herself up alone to collect her ideas. The world was not so simple as she had thought; certainly by no means so simple as it had appeared during her three years with Charles. As she had said, London was different. She had progressed so far with this great London of Butcher and Verschoyle only to find through the bookshop another London suddenly opened up before her—the London of the poor.... Poverty she had never known, except the poverty of the world of art which is created rather by indifference to money than by the grim lack of it. With Charles days had been so busy, nights so happy, that it was a small thing that every now and then she had to go hungry for a day in order that he might not lack. The immense poverty which now she saw everywhere in this West End of London, in courts off Charing Cross Road, in vast workmen's dwellings, in Soho, and by her own rooms at the back of Leicester Square, everywhere round the calculated magnificence of the theatres, overwhelmed her and changed many of her conceptions; first of all her attitude towards Kitty Messenger, whom she had regarded as a vulgar nuisance, a horrible intrusion from the past. It was impossible for her to accept her position of security above the dirty sea of poverty.

She loathed the poor, their indolence, their coarseness, their horrible manners, their loud mirth and violent anger.... Once outside her door two drunken women fought. They leaned against the wall, clutching each other by the hair, and attempted, while they breathed thick curses into each other's glaring faces, to bite, to scratch, each to bang the other's head against the wall.... Clara ran past them trembling in every limb. She had never seen the uncontrolled brutality of which human beings are capable.... But it was even worse when a policeman arrested the two women and roughly dragged them away.

And after that she was continually coming upon similar scenes, or upon degraded and

derelict types. It was as though she had been blind and was suddenly able to see—or had the world turned evil?

How could Verschoyle, how could Charles, how could all the well-dressed and well-fed people be so happy while such things were going on before their eyes? Perhaps, like herself, they could not see them. It was very strange.

Stranger still was the release of energy in herself, bringing with it a new personal interest in her own life. She began to look more keenly at other women and to understand them a little better, to sympathise even with their vanity, their mindlessness, their insistence upon homage and flattery from their men. From that she passed to a somewhat bewildered introspection, realising that it was extraordinary that she should have been able to sever her connection with Charles and to maintain the impersonal when the personal relationship was suspended—or gone? Yes. That was quite extraordinary, and because of it she knew that she could never live the ordinary woman's life, absorbed entirely in external things, in position, clothes, food and household, shops.

She remembered Charles saying that his feeling for her was at the farthest end of love, and certainly she had never known anything like the relationship between, say, Freeland and Julia—easy, comfortable romance. To be either easy or comfortable had become an abomination to her, and at bottom this was the reason for her dissatisfaction. It had been too easy to procure the beginnings of success for Charles. They had secured control of the machinery of the theatre, and must now act in accordance with its grinding.

For some weeks she was paralysed and could do nothing but sit and brood; hardly thinking at all consciously, but gazing in upon herself and the forces stirring in her, creeping up and up to take control of her imagination that had hitherto been entirely free and in undisputed mastery of her being. This was a time of the acutest agony. She would not surrender. Without knowing what was being demanded of her she cried, 'I will not, I will not.' But the forces stirring in her were implacable, and changed her whole physical sensation of being. Her body changed, her figure altered most subtly and imperceptibly, her face gained in strength and beauty, but she loathed the change, because it was taking place without reference to her own will, or her own imagination, which for the first time in her life was baffled.... It was appalling to her, who had always found it so easy to direct the lives of others, to find her own life slipping with a terrible velocity out of control.... No thought, no notion of her recent days was now valid. At the very worst stage of all even simple movements seemed incomprehensible. When she caught sight of her own lovely arm that had always given her a thrill of pleasure, it now repelled her as something fantastic and irresistibly comic, revoltingly comic at this time when she was a prey to so much obscure suffering, so deep that she could trace it to no cause, so acute that she could discern in it no purpose.

She found it almost her sole relief to read, and she devoured among other curious works which she found at her bookshop, General Booth's *Darkest London* and Rose's *The Truth about the Transvaal*. Novels she could not read at all. Fiction was all very well, but it ought to have some relation to human emotions as they are. After her aerial life in Charles's imagination she needed a diet of hard facts, and, as usual, what she needed that she obtained. Both Booth and Rose dealt with the past, but that made them the more palatable, and they reassured her. The facts she was now discovering had been present to other minds and her own had not unsupported to bear the whole weight of them.... In her untouched youth she had always accepted responsibility for the whole universe, and so long as her life had been made easy, first of all by her grandfather, and then by Charles, the burden had been tolerable, and she had been able to mould the universe to make them comfortable. But now that life was suddenly for no apparent reason incredibly difficult, the burden was greater than she could bear, and it relieved her to find in these two books the utterance of suffering consciences..... As she read Rose she remembered a saying of her grandfather's, 'The British make slums wherever they go because in every British mind there is a slum.'

She could find relief in the books, but she could not stay the welling up of the mysterious forces which swamped the clarity of her mind and made her usually swift intuition sluggish.

Very thankful was she that she had steered Charles into the Imperium before this cataclysm broke in her.... She could well be alone to sort out if possible the surfeit of new impressions from which she was suffering. She no longer had thoughts but only obsessions. London.... London.... London.... The roaring traffic: the crowds of people: Coventry Street by night: the illuminated theatres: the statue in Piccadilly Circus: the hotel in which she and Charles had stayed on their first night in London: the painted faces of the women: policemen: commissionaires: wonderful cars lit up at night, gliding through the streets with elegant ladies in evening dress reclining at their ease, bored, mechanical, as hard and mechanical as the cars that carried them through the streets: the drunken women fighting outside her door: the woman opposite her windows who kept a canary in a cage and watered so lovingly the aspidistra on her window-sill: tubes: lifts: glaring lights and white tiles.... London.... London.... London....

Through it all there ran a thread of struggling, conscious purpose which kept her from misery and made it impossible for her to succumb. Deep in her heart she knew that she could not; that she had escaped; that it would never be for her an awful, a terrible, an overwhelming thing to be a woman.

With that knowledge there came an exultation, a pride, a triumphant sense of having come through an almost fatal peril, the full nature of which had yet to be revealed. And she had wrestled through it alone. Her childish detestation of her womanhood was gone. She accepted it, gloried in it as her instrument and knew that she would never be lost in it.

For ever in her mind that crisis was associated with Kropotkin's escape from prison, and she was full of a delighted gratitude to the little bookseller who had lent her the book, the second volume, the first having been borrowed.

Immeasurably increased was her understanding through this sudden convulsion of her life, and she was very proud of the loyalty to her instinct which had made her wrestle through it alone; and now, when she saw women absorbed in external things, she knew that they had taken refuge in them from just such convulsions in which, had they attempted to face them, they must have been swamped. They clung to external things to prevent themselves being lost in the whirlpool of the internal world of womanhood.... Ah! It was supreme to be a woman, to contain the most fierce and most powerful of all life's manifestations, to smile and to distil all these violent forces into charm, to suffer and to turn all suffering into visible beauty.

If Clara now had any easy pity it was for men, who live always in fantasy, lured on by their own imaginings in the vain effort to solve the mystery of which only a true and loyal woman has the key.

When once more she approached her external life it was through the bookshop, where she found her friend the bookseller munching his lunch of wheaten biscuits and apples in the dingy little room at the back of his shop.

He offered her an apple. She took it and sat on a pile of books tied up with a rope.

'You're looking bonny,' he said.

'I think I'll come and be your assistant.'

'A fine young leddy like you?'

'I might meet some one like Kropotkin.'

'Ah! Isn't that grand? There's none o' your Dumas and Stevensons can beat that; a real happening in our own life-time.... But I can no afford an assistant.'

'Oh! You always seem to have plenty of people in your shop.'

'These damned publishers put their prices up and up on the poor bookseller, and my brains are all my capital, and I will not sell the stuff that's turned out like bars o' soap, though the authors may be as famous as old Nick and the publishers may roll by in their cars and build their castles in the countryside.... I sell my books all the week, and I grow my own food on my own plot on Sundays, and I'll win through till I'm laid in the earth, and have a pile o' books to keep me down when I'm dead as they have done in my lifetime.'

He thrust a slice of apple into his mouth and munched away at it, rosy defiance of an ill-ordered world shining from his healthy cheeks.

On his desk Clara saw his account book, a pile of bills, and old cheques, and it was not difficult to guess the cause of his trouble.

'I'm sure I should sell your books for you.'

'You'd draw all London into my shop, young leddy, as you'll draw them to the playhouse; but bookselling is a dusty trade and is not for fair wits or fine persons.'

Clara looked out into the shop, and was happy in its friendliness. A lean, hungry-looking man came in, bought a paper, and stayed turning over the books. She could not see his face, but something in his movement told of quality of wit and precise consciousness. He seized a book with a familiar mastery, as though he could savour and weigh its contents through his finger-tips, glanced through it, and put it away as though it were finally disposed of. There was a concentrated absorption in everything he did that made it definite and final. He was so sensitive that at the approach of another person he edged away as though to avoid a distasteful impact.... Very shabby he was, but distinguished and original. After taking up half a dozen books and not finding in them any attraction, he stopped, pondered, and moved out of the shop quite obviously having clearly in his mind some necessary and inevitable purpose.

His going was a wrench to Clara, so wholly had she been absorbed in him; but though she longed to know his name she could not bring herself to ask her old friend who he was. That did not matter. He was, and Charing Cross Road had become a hallowed place by profound experience, the bookshop a room beyond all others holy.

For some time longer, Clara sat in silence with her old friend, who lit his after-luncheon pipe and sat cross-legged, blinking and ruminant. She stared into the shop, and still it seemed that the remarkable figure was standing there fingering the books, pondering, deciding. Her emotions

thrilled through her, uplifted her, and she had a sensation of being deliciously intimate with all things animate and inanimate. She touched the desk by her side, and it seemed to her that life tingled through her fingers into the wood. She smiled at the old man, and his eyes twitched, and he gave her a little happy sidelong nod. She wanted to tell him that the world was a very wonderful place, but she could only keep on smiling, and as she left the shop, the bookseller thrust his hat on the back of his head, scratched his beard, and said,—

'Pegs! I said to Jenny she'll bring me luck. But she's wasted on yon birkie ca'd a lord.'

IX

MAGIC

A friendly city seemed London to Clara as she left the shop. A fresh wind was blowing, and she stood for some moments to drink in the keen air. The sky was full of clouds, gray, white, and cinnamon against the smoky blue, as she turned south with eyes newly eager for beauty and friendliness. Above the roofs, the statue of Lord Nelson stood perched in absurd elevation above the London that flouted his Emma, and Clara laughed to see the little gray man in cocked hat symbolising for her the delicious absurdity of London, where nothing and nobody could ever be of the smallest importance in its hugeness.... This was its charm, that an individual could in it feel the indifference of humanity exactly as on a hill the indifference of Nature can be felt. A city of strangers! Everybody was strange to everybody else. That was good and healthy. Nothing in London was on show, nothing dressed for the tourist. Living in rooms in London, one could be as lonely as in a hut in the wilderness.

She walked down to the Imperium, and, entering by the stage door, found Charles in excited converse with the scenic artist, Mr Smithson, who was looking at a drawing and scratching his head dubiously.

'It's clever, Mr Mann, but nothing like the seaside. Sir Henry's sure to want his waves "off," and the sun ought to look a bit like it.'

'That's my design, Mr Smithson. Sir Henry said you would paint it. If you won't, I'll do it myself.... Ah! Clara, do come and explain to Mr Smithson what we want.'

Smithson turned angrily.—

'He gives me a blooming drawing with purples and golds and blues and every colour but the natural colours of a sea-side place. I've painted scenery for thirty years, and I ought to know what a stage island is like by now. I've done a dozen sets for *The Tempest* in my time.'

'It is an enchanted island,' said Clara.

'But Prospero was Duke of Milan.... I've *been* to the Mediterranean to see for myself and I know what the colouring is.... I can't believe that Sir Henry has passed this. God knows what kind of lighting it will take.'

Charles threw his hat on the ground and stamped on it.

'Dolt! Fool! Idiot!' he shouted. 'Go away and paint it as I tell you to paint it.'

'Damned if I do,' said Smithson. 'My firm has painted all the scenery for this theatre since Sir Henry took it, and we've had our name on the programme, and we've got a reputation to lose. When Shakespeare says an island, he means an island, not the crater of a blooming volcano....'

Charles snatched his drawing out of Mr Smithson's hand, and with an expression of extreme agony he said.—

'Clara, you dragged me into this infernal theatre. Will you please see that I am not driven mad in it? Am I an artist?'

'You may be an artist, Mr Mann,' said Mr Smithson, 'but I'm a practical scene-painter. I was painting scenery before you were born. I was three years old in my father's workshop when I put my first dab of paint on for the Valley of Diamonds for Drury Lane in Gustus Harris's days.'

The argument might have gone on indefinitely, but fortunately Sir Henry came down the stairs with Lady Butcher. He was immaculately dressed in frock-coat and top hat, gray Cashmere trousers, and white waistcoat to attend with his wife a fashionable reception. With a low bow, he swept off his very shiny hat, and said to Lady Butcher,—

'My dear, Mr Charles Mann.'

Lady Butcher gave a curt nod.

'My dear, Miss Day....'

'Che-arming!' drawled Lady Butcher, holding out her hand very high in the air. Clara reached up to it and shook it sharply.

'Mr Smithson doesn't like Charles's drawing for the cave scene,' said Clara. 'He can't quite see it, you know, because it is a little different.'

'I won't be a moment, my dear,' said Sir Henry, and Lady Butcher sailed out into the street.

'What's the matter, Smithson?'

'We've never done anything like this before. There's nothing like it in Nature.'

'There is nothing like Caliban in Nature,' said Clara sweetly, and Sir Henry caught at her hint, scowled at Smithson, and growled,—

'I have passed it. If it needs modification we can settle it at rehearsal. Go ahead. I want to see it before I go away.'

'But there are no measurements, Sir Henry.'

'You know what we can do and what we can't.'

'Very well, Sir Henry.' Mr Smithson clapped on his bowler hat and rushed away.

Charles stooped to gather up his battered hat, and Sir Henry seized Clara's arm, squeezed it tight, looked out through the door at his magnificent wife, and heaved an enormous sigh. Clara in her amazing new happiness smiled at him, and he muttered,—

'You grow in beauty every day. A-ah! Good-day, Mann. The theatre is at your disposal.'

He fixed his eyes on Clara for a moment, then wrenched himself away.

There were one or two letters for her in the rack. She took them down, and turned to find Charles, having smoothed out his hat, standing ruefully staring through his pince-nez.

'These people are altogether too busy for me,' he said. 'All the work I've put in seems to be nothing to them. I had a terrible turn with Butcher two days ago, and now this man Smithson has been too much for me. They treat me like a tailor, and expect me to cut my scenery to fit their theatre.... I wish you'd come back, chicken. I'm in a dreadful muddle. I've been working till I can't see, and I've been reading *The Tempest* till my mind is as salt as a dried haddock.... But I've drawn a marvellous Caliban, part fish, part frog, part man ... Life emerging from the sea. I'm sure now that we're all spawned from the sea, and that life on the earth is only what has been left after the sun has dried it up....'

Clara looked at him apprehensively. She still felt responsible for him, but she was no longer part and parcel of him. She was free of his imagination and could be critical of it.

'Never mind, Charles,' she said. 'Let us go and look at the stage, and you can tell me what you have planned, and then we will go out and talk, and decide what we will do during the holidays. I have promised to go to Sir Henry's in the Lakes for a few days, and Verschoyle has promised to motor me up there.'

Charles's fingers fumbled rather weakly round his lips, and she saw to her distress that he had been biting his nails again.

'Aren't you ever coming back, my chicken, my love? ... I'm sorry we came to London now. We should have gone to Sicily as I wanted. One can live in such places. Here everybody is so business-like, so set, so used to doing and thinking in one particular way.'

'Has anything happened?' asked Clara, knowing that he was never critical without a cause.

'No,' he replied, rather shortly, 'no.'

She was rather irritated by him. He had no right to be as foolish and helpless as to have let her humiliate him by extricating him from his argument with Smithson, upon which he ought never to have entered. Smithson was only a kind of tradesman after all.

They went on to the stage and Charles waxed eloquent over the scenery he had designed. Eloquence with Charles was rather an athletic performance. He took a tape measure from his pocket, and raced about with it, making chalk marks on the boards.

The scenery door was open, and the sunlight poured in in a great shaft upon him, and Clara, watching him, was suddenly most painfully sorry for him. He worked himself up into a throbbing enthusiasm, torrents of words poured from his lips, as with strange gesticulations he described the towering rocks, the wind-twisted trees, the tangle of lemons, the blue light illuminating the

magician's grotto, the golden light that should hang about the rocky island jutting up from the sea. All this he talked of, while the sun shone through his long yellow hair and revealed its streaks of silver.... At last he stood in the sunlight, with his arms outstretched, as though he were evoking his vision from the heavens to take shape upon the stage.

Clara, watching him, perceived that he was a born actor. He trod the stage with loving feet, and with a movement entirely different from that which he used in the street or among people who were not of the theatre. This surely was the real Charles. The light of the sun upon him was inappropriate. It mocked him and inexorably revealed the fact that he was no longer young. The scenery door was closed and the discordance ceased, but more clearly than ever was Charles revealed as an actor treading easily and affectionately his native elevation. The influence of the place affected even himself, and after he had constructed his imaginary scenery round himself, he said,—

'One of the first parts I ever played was Ferdinand staggering beneath logs of wood.'

He assumed an imaginary log and recited,—

> 'This my mean task would be
> As heavy to me as 'tis odious; but
> The mistress which I serve quickens what's dead
> And makes my labours pleasures: Oh, she is
> Ten times more gentle than her father's crabbed;
> And he's composed of harshness. I must remove
> Some thousands of these logs and pile them up,
> Upon a sore injunction: my sweet mistress
> Weeps when she sees me work; and says such baseness
> Had never like executor.

He produced the illusion of youth, and his voice was so entrancing that Clara, like Miranda, wept to see him.... He threw off his part with a great shout, rushed at her and caught her up in a hug.

'Chicken,' he said, 'don't let us be silly any more. We have won through. Here we are in the theatre. We've conquered the stage, and soon all those seats out there will be full of eager people saying, "Who are these wonders? Can it be? Surely they are none other than Charles and Clara Mann?"'

'Day,' said she.

He stamped his foot impatiently.

'What's in a name? Day, if you like. Artists can and must do as they please. This is our real life, here where we make beauty. The rest is for city clerks and stockbrokers who can't trust themselves to behave decently unless they have a perfect net of rules from which they cannot escape.'

'I don't want to talk about it. Go on with your work, Charles.'

'I've finished for to-day.... Will you let me take you out to dinner?'

'No. I've promised Verschoyle.'

'Damn! You oughtn't to be seen with him so much. People will say you have left me for his money.'

'I thought artists didn't care what people say.'

'They don't, Clara. They don't.'

'You must be sensible, Charles. You're not safe. You can't take risks until you are successful.'

'Then I won't succeed. I won't go on.... A most unfortunate thing has happened. Clott has vanished with all the money in the bank.... I let him sign the cheques.'

'Oh! Oh! you fool, Charles.'

'He kept getting cheques out of me.'

'How?'

'He said he'd tell the police.'

Clara stamped her foot. Abominable! How abominable people were.... She had to protect Charles, but if she was with him she exposed him to the most fearful risk. Was ever a girl in so maddening a position?

What made it worse was that her attitude towards him had changed. She was no longer so utterly absorbed in him that she could only see life through his eyes. Apart from him she had grown and had developed her own independent existence.

'How much did he take?'

'Two hundred and ten pounds. We can't prosecute him, or he'll tell. He knows that, or he wouldn't have done it.'

'Where is he?'

'I don't know. Laverock met him the other day, and asked him about some committee business. He had the impudence to say that he had resigned, and had come into money, so that his name was now no longer Clott but Cumberland.'

And again Clara found herself in her heart saying, 'It is my fault.'

It was all very well for Charles to believe that the world was governed by magic. Art is magic, but she ought to have known that it is a magic which operates only among a very few, and that the many who are moved only by cunning are always taking advantage of them.... Poor Charles! Betrayed at every turn by his own simplicity, betrayed even by her eagerness to help him!

'It is too bad,' said Clara, with tears in her eyes. 'We can't do anything. Besides I would never send any one to prison, whatever they did. But what a dirty mean little toad.... How did he find out?'

'I don't know. He's the kind of man who hangs about the theatre and borrows five shillings on Friday night.'

Gone was the magic of the stage, gone the power in Charles. He looked just a tired, seedy fellow, more than a little ashamed of himself. He hung his head and muttered,—

'This always happens when I am rich. I've been terribly unhappy about it. I didn't think I could tell you. I went into a shop yesterday to buy a revolver, but I bought a photograph frame instead, because the man was so pleasant that I couldn't bear the idea of his helping me to end my life.... I seem to muddle everything I touch, and yet no one has ever dared to say that I am not a great artist.'

Clara walked away from him across the stage. There had been muddles before, but nothing so bad as this.

As she walked, she found that in watching him she had learned the art of treading the stage, and of becoming that something more than herself which is necessary for dramatic presentation. This sudden acquisition gave her a delighted thrill, and once again her life was flooded with magic, so that this new trouble, like her old, seemed very remote, and she could understand Charles's pretending that he must end his life even to the point of attempting to buy a revolver, which became impossible directly some one spoke pleasantly to him. She felt confident and secure and of the theatre which was a sanctuary that nothing in the outside world could violate.

'Don't worry, Carlo,' she said. 'I'll see that it is put straight.'

'Then you'll come back and stop this nonsense about living alone?'

'When *The Tempest* is done we'll see about it. I don't want to risk that. *The Tempest* is what matters now.'

'Are you going to play in it?'

'I don't know yet.... Will you go out into the auditorium and tell me what you think of my voice?'

Charles went up into the dress circle, and Clara, practising her newly-acquired art, turned to an imaginary Ferdinand—more vivid and actual to her now—and declaimed,—

> 'I do not know
> One of my sex! no woman's face remember,
> Save, from my glass, mine own; nor have I seen
> More that I may call men, than you, good friend,
> And my dear father: how features are abroad,
> I am skilless of; but, by my modesty,—
> The jewel in my dower,—I would not wish
> Any companion in the world but you.'

She stopped. The vivid, actual Ferdinand of her imagination changed into the form of the lean, hungry-looking man of the book-shop. He turned towards her, and his face was noble in its suffering, powerful and strong to bear the burden upon the mind behind it. Very sweet and gentle was the expression in his eyes, in most pathetic contrast to the rugged hardness which a

passionate self-control had shaped upon his features.... Her heart ached under this astonishment that in this phantom she could see and know and love his face upon which in life her eyes had never fallen.

'Go on,' called Charles, from the dress circle.... 'Admirable.... I never thought you could do it.'

'That's enough,' she replied, with a violent effort to shake free of her bewilderment and sweet anguish.

'If I meet him,' she said in her heart, 'I shall love him and there will be nothing else.'

Aloud she said,—

'I must not.'

She had applied herself to the task of furthering Charles's ambition, and until she had succeeded she would not yield, nor would she seek for herself in life any advantage or even any natural fulfilment.

Charles came back in a state of excitement.

'It was wonderful,' he said. 'What has happened to you? Your voice is so full and round. You lose yourself entirely, you speak with a voice that has in it all the colour and beauty and enchantment of my island. You move simply, inevitably, so that every gesture is rhythmical, and like a musical accompaniment to the words.... You'll be an artist. You are an artist. There has been nothing like it since the old days.... Duse could not do more with her voice.'

'I didn't know,' she said. 'I didn't know.'

'But I did,' he cried. 'I did. I knew you would become a wonder.... Bother money, bother Butcher, bother Clott, and damn the committee. Together we shall be irresistible—as we have been. You didn't tell me you were practising. If that is why you want to be alone I have nothing to say against it. I've been a selfish brute.'

She was deeply moved. Never before had Charles shown the slightest thought for her. Human beings as such were nothing to him, but for an artist, as for art, no trouble was too great, no sacrifice too extreme for him.

He seized her hands and kissed them over and over again.

'I've been your first audience,' he said. 'Come out now, and I'll buy you flowers; your room shall be so full of flowers that you can hardly move through them. As for Verschoyle, he shall pay. It shall be his privilege to pay for us while we give the world the priceless treasure that is in us.'

His words rather repelled and hurt her, and in her secret mind she protested,—

'But I am a woman. But I am a woman.'

It hurt her cruelly that Charles should be blind to that, blind to the cataclysmic change in her, blind to her new beauty and to her newly gathered force of character. After all, the magic of the stage was only illusion, a trick that, if it were not a flowering of the deeper magic of the heart, was empty, vain, contemptible, a thing of darkness and cajolery.

'Perhaps it was just an accident,' said Clara.

'Do it again!' said Charles, in a tone of command.

'What?'

'Do it again!'

'I can't.'

'Do it again, I tell you. When you do a thing like that you have to find out how you did it. Art isn't a thing of chance. You must do it again now.'

'No.'

To her horror and amazement he pounced on her, seized her roughly by the shoulders, and shook her until her head rolled from side to side and her teeth chattered. He was beside himself with passion, ruthless, impersonal in his fury to catch and hold this treasure of art which had so suddenly appeared in the child whom hitherto he had regarded as about as important as his hat or his walking-stick.

'By Jove,' he said, 'I might have known it was not for nothing that I fished you out of Picquart's studio....'

'How dare you speak to me like that?'

She knocked his hands away and stood quivering in an outraged fury, and lashed out at him with her tongue.

'I'm not paint that you can squeeze out of a tube,' she said. 'You treat people as though they were just that and then you complain if they round on you.... I know what you want. You want to squeeze out of me what your own work lacks....'

Charles reeled under this assault and his arms fell limply by his side.

'Forgive me,' he said, 'I didn't know what I was doing. I was knocked out with my astonishment and delight.... Really, really I forgot the stage was empty. I thought we were working....'

Clara stared at him. Could he really so utterly lose himself in the play as that? Or was he only persuading himself that it was so? ... With a sudden intuition she knew that in all innocence he was lying to her, and that what had enraged him was the knowledge, which he could never admit, that she was no longer a child living happily in his imagination but a human being and an artist who had entered upon a royal possession of her own. She had outstripped him. She had become an artist without loss of humanity. Henceforth she must deal with realities, leaving him to his painted mummery... She could understand his frenzy, his fury, his despair.

'That will do, Charles,' she said very quietly. 'I will see what can be done about Mr Clott, and whatever happens I will see that you are not harmed.... If you like, you can dine with Verschoyle and me to-night. You can come home with me now, while I dress. I am to meet him at the Carlton and then we are going on to the Opera.'

'Does Verschoyle know?'

'He knows that you are you and that I am I—that is all he cares about... He is a good man. If people must have too much money, he is the right man to have it. He would never let a man down for want of money—if the man was worth it.'

'Ah!' said Charles, reassured. This was like the old Clara speaking, but with more assurance, a more certain knowledge and less bewildering intuition and guess-work.

X

THE ENGLISH LAKES

A few weeks later, with Verschoyle and a poor relation of his, a Miss Vibart Withers, for chaperone, Clara left London in a 60 h.p. Fiat, which voraciously ate up the Bath Road at the rate of a mile every minute and a half.... It was good to be out of the thick heat of London, invaded by foreigners and provincials and turned into a city of pleasure and summer-frocks, so that its normal life was submerged, its character hidden. The town became as lazy and drowsy a spectacle as a field of poppies over which danced gay and brilliant butterflies. Very sweet was it then to turn away from it, and all that was happening in it, to the sweet air and to fly along between green fields and orchards, through little towns, at intervals to cross the Thames and to feel that with each crossing London lay so much farther away. Henley, Oxford, Lechlade, and the Cotswolds—that was the first day, and, breathing the clover-scented air, gazing over the blue plains to the humpy hills of Malvern, Clara flung back her head and laughed in glee.... How wonderful in one day to shake free of everything, to leave behind all trammels!

'No one need have any troubles now,' she said, with the bewitching smile that made all her discoveries so entrancing. 'When people get tied up in knots, they can just get into a car and go away. The world is big enough for everybody.'

'But people love their troubles,' replied Verschoyle. 'I have been looking for trouble all my life, but I can't find it. That's my trouble.'

'Everybody ought to be happy,' she said.

'In their own way. Most people are very happy with their troubles. They will take far more trouble over them than they will over their pleasures or making other people happy.'

'Do you remember the birds and fishes?'

'Do I not? It was the birds and fishes who introduced you to me.'

'I think this was what Charles meant by them—escape, irrelevance, holiday.'

'That's quite true. Nothing ought to be as serious as it is, for nothing is so serious as it looks

when you really come to grips with it. Life always looks like a blank wall until you come up to it and then there is a little door which was invisible at a distance.... I found that out when I met you.'

'And did you go through it?'

'Straight through and out to the other side.'

Clara took his hand affectionately, and their eyes met in a happy smile. They were friends for ever, the relationship most perfectly suited to his temperament, most needed by hers.

From that she passed on to a frank discussion of her own situation with regard to Charles, and the hole he was in through the absconding Mr Clott.

'I knew that fellow was a scoundrel,' said Verschoyle. 'He tried to borrow money from me, and to pump me about the form of my horses. How on earth did he ever become secretary to a committee for the furtherance of dramatic art?'

'He turned up. Everything in Charles's life turns up. *I* turned up.'

'And is your name really Day?'

'It was my grandfather's name.... I never had any one else. I remember no one else except an Italian nurse, with a very brown face and very white teeth. He died in Paris four years ago. My people were in India.'

'Ah! Families get lost sometimes in the different parts of the British Empire. It is so big, you know. I'm sure the English will lose themselves in it one of these fine days.'

He passed over without a word her position as wife and no wife, but became only the kinder and more considerate. It had eased and relieved her to talk of it. Every impediment to their friendship was removed, but sometimes as they walked through fields he would grip his stick very tight and lash out at a hemlock or a dog-daisy, and sometimes when he was driving he would jam his foot down on the accelerator and send the car whirling along. If they had met Charles walking along the road it would have gone ill with him.

They were six days on their journey up through Shropshire, Cheshire, and the murk of South Lancashire. They stayed in pleasant inns, and made many strange acquaintances, bagmen, tourists, young men with knapsacks on their backs escaping from the big towns, and sometimes they helped these young men over dreary stretches of road.

'The happiest six days of my life,' said Verschoyle, as they approached the mountains. 'I haven't toured in England before. Somehow in London one knows nothing of England. One is bored and one goes over to Homburg or Aix-les-bains. How narrow life is even with a car and a yacht!'

How narrow life could be Clara soon discovered at the Butchers', where London life was simply continued in a lovely valley at the bottom of which lay a little lake shining like a mirror and vividly reflecting the hills above it.

The Butchers had a long, low house in an exquisite garden, theatrically arranged so that the flowers looked as if they were painted and the trees had no roots, but were as though clamped and ironed to the earth. From their garden the very hills had the semblance of a back-cloth.

The house was full of the elegant young men and women who ran in and out of the theatre and had no compunction about interrupting even rehearsals. They chaffed Sir Henry, and fed Lady Butcher with scandal for the pleasure of hearing her say witty biting things, which, as she had no mercy, came easily to her lips. She studiously treated Clara as though she were part and parcel of Verschoyle, and to be accommodated like his car or his chauffeur.... Except as a social asset, Lady Butcher detested the theatre, and she loathed actresses.

As the days floated by—for once in a way the weather in Westmoreland was delicious—it became apparent to Clara that Lady Butcher hated the project of Charles's production of *The Tempest*. She never missed an opportunity of stabbing at him with her tongue. She regarded him as a vagabond.

Living herself in a very close and narrow set, she respected cliques more than persons. Verschoyle was rich enough to live outside a clique, but that a man with a career to make should live and work alone was in her eyes a kind of blasphemy. As for Clara—Lady Butcher thought of her as a minx, a designing actress, one of the many who had attempted to divert Sir Henry from the social to the professional aspect of the theatre, which, in few words, Lady Butcher regarded as her own, a kind of salon which gave her a unique advantage over her rivals in the competition of London's hostessry.

It was the more annoying to Lady Butcher that Clara and Verschoyle should turn up when they did as two Cabinet Ministers were due to motor over to lunch one day, and a famous editor was to stay for a couple of nights, while her dear friends the Bracebridges (Earl and Countess),

with their son and daughter, were due for their annual visit.

Distressed by this atmosphere of social calculation, Clara spent most of her time with Verschoyle, walking about the hills or rowing on the lake; but unfortunately she roused the boyish jealousy in Sir Henry, who, as he had 'discovered' her, regarded her as his property, and considered that any romance she might desire should be through him.... He infuriated his wife by preferring Clara to all the other young ladies, and one night when, after dinner, he took her for a moon-light walk, she created a gust of laughter by saying,—

'Henry can no more resist the smell of grease-paint than a dog can resist that of a grilled bone.'

This was amusing but unjust, for Sir Henry regarded his desire for Clara's society as a healthy impulse towards higher things—at least, he told her so as he led her out through the orchard and up the stony path, down which trickled a little stream, to the crag that dominated the house and garden. It was covered with heather and winberries, and just below the summit grew two rowan-trees. So bright was the moon that the colour of the berries was almost perceptible. Sir Henry stood moon-gazing and presently heaved a great sigh,—

'A-a-ah!'

'What a perfect night!' said Clara.

'On such a night as this——'

'On such a night——'

'I've forgotten,' said Sir Henry. 'It is in the *Merchant of Venice*. Something about moonlight when Lorenzo and Jessica eloped. You would make a perfect Jessica.... I played Lorenzo once.'

Clara wanted to laugh. It was one of the most delightful elements in Sir Henry's character that he could never see himself as old, or as anything but romantically heroic.

'Yes,' he said; 'you have made all the difference in the world. It was remarkable how you shone out among the players in my theatre.... It is even more remarkable among all these other masqueraders in that house down there. All the world's a stage——'

'Oh, no,' said Clara. 'It is beautiful. I didn't know England was so lovely. As we came north in the car I thought each county better than the last—and I forgot London altogether.'

'It is some years since I toured,' said Sir Henry. 'My wife does not approve of it, but there is nothing like it for keeping you up to the mark. The real audiences are out of London. A couple of years' touring would do you a world of good. You shall make your name first.... There aren't any actors and actresses now simply because they won't tour. They want money in London—money in New York—the pity of it is that they get it.'

Clara scrambled up to the highest point of the crag and stood with the gentle wind playing through her thick hair, caressing her parted lips, her white neck, liquefying her light frock about her limbs.

'Oh, my God!' cried Sir Henry, gazing at her enraptured. 'Ariel!'

As she stood there she was caught up in the wonder of the night, became one with it, a beam in the moonlight, a sigh in the wind, a star winking, a little tiny cloud floating over the tops of the mountains. So lightly poised was she that it seemed miraculous that she did not take to flight, almost against nature that she could stand so still. Her lips parted, and she sang as she used to sing when she was a child,—

> Come unto these yellow sands
> And then take hands.'

A little young voice she had, sweet and low, a boyish voice, nothing of woman in it at all.

She leaned forward and gazed over the edge of the crag, and Sir Henry, who was so deeply moved that all his ordinary mental processes were dislocated, thought with a horrid alarm that she was going to throw herself down. Such perfection might rightly end in tragedy, and he thought with anguish of Mann and Verschoyle, thought that they had besmirched and dishonoured this loveliness, thought that this sudden exaltation and abstraction must come from the anguish that was betrayed in her eyes so often and so frequently.

'Take care! Take care!' called Sir Henry.

She leaped down into the heather by his side, and he said,—

'It seems a crime to take you back into the house. What have you to do with whether or no we are asked to the next garden-party in Downing Street? You are Ariel and can put a girdle round

the earth.... I am almost afraid of you. Can't we run away and become strolling players? You may think I am to be envied but my life has been a very unhappy one.... I want to help you....'

It was obvious to Clara that he did not know what he was saying, and indeed he was light-hearted and moonstruck, lifted outside his ordinary range of experience. He babbled on,—

'If I could feel that I had done the smallest thing to help you, I should be prouder of it than of any other thing in my career.'

'But I don't want help....'

'Ah! You think so now. But wait three years.... You think an actor can know nothing of life, but who knows more? Has he not in himself to reproduce every fine shade of emotion, the effect of every variety of experience.... The people who know nothing of life are your cloistered artists like Mann, or your Verschoyle drowned in money.... You have not known me yet.'

Really he was getting rather ridiculous with his boyish romanticism. He had been married twice and his two families numbered seven. But Clara, too, was under the spell of the moon, and his gauche response to her mood had touched her.

'Life is a miserable business for a woman,' said Sir Henry. 'I live in dread lest you should be dragged down into the common experience.'

(Did he or did he not know about Charles?)

Clara laughed. This was taking her too seriously.

'Ah, you can laugh now while you are young, but youth attracts, it is drawn into the whirlpool and is lost.... Is there more in you than youth?'

'Much, much more,' said Clara exultantly. 'There has never been anybody like me before.'

'By Heaven!' swore Sir Henry. 'That is true.... You have bewitched me—and we had better be going back to the house.... Will you let me carry you down?'

Without waiting for her permission, he lifted her, and she suffered him to carry her down the last stony path, because her flimsy shoes were already wet through. He did not guess that she had good reason, and his heart thumped in his large bosom.

It had been a night of nights for him. Years of uneasy distraction had melted away. Not even at the height of his success had he felt so confident, so entirely superior to the rest of mankind as both to command and to deserve their homage. In no play had he ever devised a more romantic finale than this in which he carried his conquered sprite—for so he thought her—back to earth. As he put her down, he threw out his chest and turned to the stars as it was his habit to turn to his audiences, and bowed thrice, to the right, to the left, to the centre, with his hand upon his heart.

Verschoyle was very angry with her when she returned.

'You know how these people think of such things,' he said.

'What they think and what I do are very different,' retorted Clara, her eyes shining, her cheeks glowing from the night air. 'It makes him happy, and, if you are happy with me, he doesn't see why he shouldn't be. *Pourquoi pas moi aussi*? Men are all alike.'

'It is not the same.... What a child you are! Some day you will love and then you will see very differently.... The old fool thinks you are——'

'No. He said I was Ariel. So I am. So I am.... I wonder I never thought of it before. I shall never be a woman as women have been——'

'There have been good women.'

'Tra la la! The good women have done far more harm in the world than all the bad women put together. Lady B is a good woman.'

'A painted tigress. *She* won't forgive you in a hurry. She thinks—that, too.'

'People can't think beyond what they are. You can't expect me to be what other people think.'

'I want you to be yourself.'

'So I am.... You shall take me away in a day or two. I want to see the Bracebridges just for fun, *and* the Cabinet Ministers, and then I want to drown their memories one by one in the lakes as we pass them. We are going to see them all, aren't we?'

'I want to get away. I can't bear being with you in this atmosphere of money.'

'Now, now. You promised me you would never behave like a lover.'

'I thought I was behaving like an angry brother.'

She was pleased with him for that. She knew that part of his trouble was due to his being an only son.

The Bracebridges were disappointing: a very dull man, a hard and raffish woman, but apparently to Lady Butcher they were the wonder of all wonders. She and Lady Bracebridge were to each other 'dear Ethel' and 'dearest Madge.' Together they made a single dominant and very formidable personality, which must be obeyed. They flung themselves upon the house-party, sifted the affairs of every member of it, and in three days had arranged for two engagements and one divorce. They commanded Verschoyle—by suggestion—to marry a Mrs Slesinger, who was plain but almost as rich as himself, and in his distress he very nearly succumbed; but Clara swooped in to save him, and found that her position was made almost impossible by whispered tittle-tattle, cold looks, and downright rudeness. She was distinctly left out of picnic and boating parties, and almost in contempt she was partnered with Sir Henry who, after Lady Bracebridge's arrival, was no longer master in his own house.... When the Cabinet Ministers arrived the situation became impossible for they produced chaos. The household was dislocated, and in the confusion Clara packed, had her trunks carried to the garage, and slipped away with Verschoyle.

Said he,—

'These damned politicians can't get off the platform. Did you see how that old fool sawed the air when he talked of Ireland, and did you hear how the other bleated when he mouthed of Poor Law Reform? They're on show—always on show.... So are these infernal lakes. I can't stand scenery that has stared at me for hours in a railway carriage.'

'It doesn't matter,' said Clara. 'You may be unjust to Lady Butcher, but you mustn't be unjust to Rydal.'

'It is so still and out of date.... I can't think of it without thinking of Wordsworth, and I don't want to think of Wordsworth.... Being with you makes me want to get on into the future, and there's something holding us all back.'

All the same, their holiday swept up to a triumphant conclusion, and they forgot the Butchers and their London elegance in going from inn to inn in the lovely valleys, taking the car up and down breakneck hills and making on foot the ascent of Great Gable and Scafell, upon whose summit in the keen air and the gusty wind Clara let fly and danced about, wildly gay, crying out with joy to be so high above the earth, where human beings spied upon each other with jealous eyes lest one should have more happiness than another.

'They can't spoil this,' she said.

'Who?'

'Oh, all the people down there. They can spoil Charles, and you and me and silly old Sir Henry, but they can't spoil this.'

'In Switzerland,' said Verschoyle, 'there are mountains higher than this, and they make railways up them, and at the top of the railways English governesses buy Alpenstocks, and have the name of the mountain burned into the wood.'

'If I were a mountain,' said Clara, 'and they did that to me I should turn into a volcano and burn them all up, all the engineers and all the English governesses.... I'm sure Lady Bracebridge was a governess.'

'Right in once,' said Verschoyle, staring at her with round boyish eyes, as though he half expected her at once to turn into a volcano. With Clara anything might happen, and her words came from so deep a recess of her nature as almost to have the force of a prophecy.

XI

CHARING CROSS ROAD

If there is one street that more than another has in it the spirit of London it is Charing Cross Road. It begins with pickles and ends with art; it joins Crosse and Blackwell to the National Gallery. In between the two are bookshops, theatres, and music halls, and yet it is a street without ostentation. No one in Charing Cross Road can be assuming: no one could be other than genial and neighbourly. All good books come there at last to find the people who will read them long after they have been forgotten by the people who only talk about them. Books endure while

readers and talkers fade away, and Charing Cross Road by its trade in books keeps alive the continuity of London's life and deserves its fame. The books that reach this haven are for the most part honest, and therefore many a weary soul turns out of the streets where men and women swindle into this place where the thoughts of honest men are piled on shelves, or put out in the open air in boxes, marked twopence, fourpence, sixpence.... A real market this! A fair without vanity. There are pictures to look at in the windows, mementoes of dead artists and writers, and there is a constant stream of people, the oddest mixture to be found anywhere on earth.... Everybody who has nothing very much to do goes to Charing Cross Road to meet everybody who has dropped out of the main stream of humanity to have a look at it as it goes by.

You can buy food in this delectable retreat—the best holiday ground in England—and you can eat it in the ferocious book-shop kept by the mildly-mannered man who called Clara's name blessed, and had her photograph in his little dark room at the back of the shop.

Adnor Rodd always took his holidays in Charing Cross Road, for when he went into the country he worked harder even than he did in London. He wrote plays, and kept himself alive as best he could, because he hated the theatre so much that he could never force himself through a stage door. Silent, taciturn, he went on his way, caring for nothing but his work, and sparing neither himself nor any one else in pursuing it.

He had started in London with money and friends, but work became such a vice with him that he lost both, except just enough to keep him alive—to go on working. Every now and then he was 'discovered' by a playwright, a critic, or a literary man, but as he never returned a compliment in his life 'discovery' never led very far.... A few people knew that there was a strange man, called Rodd, who wrote masterpieces, but simply would not or could not take advantage of the ordinary commercial machinery to turn them into money or fame; but these few raised their eyebrows or wagged their heads when he was mentioned. Poor chap! He was out of the running, and never likely to become a member of the Thespic Club, election to which makes a man a real dramatist, whose name may be considered good for a week's business.

Rodd never thought in terms of business. He thought in terms of human relationships, and out of them composed—never ceased composing—dramas, vivid, ruthless, terrible. It was very bad for him, of course, because it forced him into a strained detachment from the life all around him, and when he met people he was always bent on finding out what they were really thinking, instead of accepting what they wished him to think was in their minds. He could no more do that than he could use his considerable technical powers to concoct the confectionery which in the theatre of those days passed, God save us, for a play. He wanted to come in contact with the dramatic essence of the people he met, but every one withheld it or protected him or herself against him, and so he lived alone. For the sake of his work he discarded the ordinary social personality which his education had taught him to acquire, and he walked through the world exposed, rather terrifying to meet; but so exquisitely sensitive that one acute pleasure—a flower, a woman's smile, a strong man shaking hands with his friend, a lovers' meeting, a real quarrel between two men who hated each other, the attention of a friendly dog—could obliterate all the horror and disgust with which most of what he saw and felt inspired him. He was sure of himself as a wind is sure of itself, but he was without conceit.... When he was very young, he had been discovered by one or two women. That was enough. He knew that the desire of women is not worth satisfying, and he left them alone unless they were in distress, and then he helped them generally at the cost of their thinking he was in love with them. Then he had to explain that he had helped them as he would help a child or a sick man. Generally they would weep and say he was a liar and a deceiver, but he knew what women's tears are worth, and when they got that far left them to prevent them going any further.... But he always had women to look after him, women who were grateful, women who, having once tasted his sympathy, could not do without it. His sympathy was passionate and to some natures like strong drink. Very few men could stand it because it went straight to the secret places of the heart, and men, unlike women, do not care to face their own secrets.

He lived in three rooms at the top of a house in Bloomsbury, one for his books, one for his work, and one for himself—for sleeping and bathing. Unlike most men who are indifferent to the outside world he was clean, because he found that slovenliness impaired his efficiency, and took the edge off his energy. He was as fastidious mentally as a trained athlete is physically.

He accepted good-humouredly the apparently unalterable incompatibility between the theatre and the drama.

A man with a single aim seems mad in a world where aims are scattered, but Rodd suffered a double isolation. Ordinary people regarded him as a cracked fool, because he would not or could not exploit his gifts and personality; while the people who really were cracked dreaded his sanity and the humorous tolerance with which he indulged their little weaknesses.

He enjoyed Charing Cross Road because it was rather like himself: it was shovelled aside and disdained by its ignoble 'betters,' the streets imposed by cosmopolitanism upon the real English London. That London he could find in Charing Cross Road, where there still beat the heart from which Fielding and Dickens had drawn their inspiration, the brave heart that could laugh through all its sufferings and through all the indignities put upon it. In Charing Cross Road he could meet almost any day Falstaff and Doll Tearsheet, Tom Jones and Partridge, Sam Weller and Sairey Gamp, and every day their descendants walked abroad, passed in and out of shops, went about

their business, little suspecting that they would be translated into the world of art when Rodd returned from his holiday to his work. He passionately loved this London, the real London, and hated everything that denied it or seemed to deny it. He loved it so greatly that he hardly needed any personal love, and he detested any loyalty which interfered with his loyalty to Shakespeare, Fielding, and Dickens, dramatists all, though Fielding's drama had been too vital for the theatre of his time and had blown it into atoms, so that since his day the actors had had to scramble along as best they could and had done so well that they had forgotten the drama altogether. They had evolved a kind of theatrical bas-relief, and were so content with it that they regarded the rounded figures of dramatic sculpture with detestation.... They dared not make room in their theatre for *Hedda Gabler* and *John Gabriel Borkman*, because they destroyed by contrast the illusions with which they maintained their activities.

The Scots bookseller was a great friend of Rodd's, and a loyal admirer, though he did not in the least understand what the strange man was about. Rodd used to talk of the virtue of an ordered world, while the bookseller lived in dreams of Anarchy, men and women left alone so that the good in them could come to the top and create a millennium of kindliness. Rodd's researches into the human heart had revealed to him only too clearly the terror that burns at the sources of human life, but because the bookseller's dreams were dear to him, because they kept him happy and benevolent, Rodd could never bring himself to push argument far enough to disturb them.

One day in this fair summer of our tale, Rodd turned into the bookshop to consume the lunch he had bought at the German Delicatessen-Magasin up the road. He found the bookseller bubbling over with happiness, dusting his books, re-arranging them, emptying large parcels of new books, and not such very subversive books either except in so far as all literature is subversive.

'Hallo!' said Rodd. 'I thought this was the slack season?'

'I'm rich,' retorted the bookseller. 'The dahned publishers are crawling to me. They've had their filthy lucre, and they know I can shift the stuff, and they're on their knees to me, begging me to take their muck by the hundred—at my own price.'

(This was a pardonable exaggeration, but it was long since the bookseller had had so much new stock.)

'If I ever want a change,' said Rodd, 'I'll get you to take me on as your assistant.'

The bookseller's jaw dropped and he stared at Rodd.

'You might do worse,' he said. 'That's the second offer I've had this year.'

'Oh! who made the first?'

'Ah!' The bookseller put his finger to his nose and chuckled. 'Ah! Some one who's in love with me.'

'There are too many books,' said Rodd. 'Too much shoddy.'

He turned away to the shelves where the plays were kept—Shaw, Barker, Galsworthy, Ibsen, Schnitzler, Hauptmann, Tschekov, Andreev, Claudel, Strindberg, Wedekind, all the authors of the Sturm and Drang period, when all over Europe the attempt was made to thrust literature upon the theatre, in the endeavour, as Rodd thought, to break the tyranny of the printed word. That was a favourite idea of his, that the tyranny of print from which the world had suffered so long would be broken by the drama. The human heart alone could break the obsessions of the human mind, otherwise humanity would lose its temper and try to smash them by cracking human heads.... Rodd always thought of humanity as an unity, an organism subject to the laws of organic life. Talk about persons and nations, groups and combinations, seemed to him irrelevant. Humanity had a will, and everything had to comply with it or suffer. At present it seemed to him that the will of humanity was diseased, and that society here in London, as elsewhere, was inert. He escaped into his imagination where he could employ to the full his dramatic energy. On the whole he hated books, but his affection for the Charing Cross Road, and for the bookseller, drew him to the shop dedicated to the efforts of revolutionary idealists, whom he thought on the whole mistaken. He desired not revolution but the restoration of the health of humanity, and like so many others, he had his nostrum—the drama. However, the air was so full of theories, social and political, that he did not expect any one to understand him.

'Have you got Mann's new book?' he asked the bookseller, who produced it: forty plates of Charles's pet designs with rather irrelevant letterpress. Rodd bought it, and that moment Clara entered the shop.

Rodd paid no attention to her. The bookseller left him with his money in his hand, and he stood turning over the pages of Charles's book, and shaking his head over the freakish will o' the wisp paragraphs. Clara spoke, and he stiffened, stared at the books in front of him, turned, caught sight of her profile, and stood gazing in amazement—a girl's face that was more than pretty, a face in which there was purpose, and proof of clear perception.

After her holiday she was looking superbly well. Health shone in her. She moved, and it was with complete unconcern for her surroundings. She lived at once in Rodd's imagination, took her rightful place as of course side by side with Beatrice, Portia, Cordelia, and Sophia Western. His imagination had not to work on her at all to re-create her, or to penetrate to the dramatic essence of her personality, which she revealed in her every gesture.

He could not hear what she was saying, but her voice went thrilling to his heart. He gasped and reeled and dropped Charles Mann's book with a crash.

Clara, who had not seen him, turned, and she, too, was overcome. He moved towards her, and stood devouring her with his eyes, and hers sought his.

'This is Rodd,' said the bookseller. 'Adnor Rodd, a great friend of mine.'

'Rodd,' repeated Clara.

'He is very much interested in the theatre,' said the bookseller.

'I was just looking at Charles Mann's new book.... Will you let me give it you?'

He moved away to pick up the book and came back clutching it, took out his fountain pen and wrote in it in a small, precise hand,—

'To my friend, from Adnor Rodd.'

'My name is Clara Day,' said she,

'You can't have a name yet.... You are just you.'

She understood him. He meant that externals were of no account in the delighted shock of their meeting. As they stood gazing at each other the book-shop vanished, London disappeared, there was nothing but they two on all the earth. Neither could move. The beginning and the end were in this moment. Nothing that they could do could alter it or make the world again as it had been for them.... Consciously neither admitted it, both stubbornly clung to what they had made of their lives.

He still held the book in his hand. She had not put out hers for it. He wrote 'Clara Day,' and he wanted to write it down several times as he did with the names of the persons in his plays, to make certain that they were rightly called.

With a faintly recurrent sense of actuality he thought of his three rooms in Bloomsbury and of the hundred and fifty pounds a year on which he lived, and with a wry smile he handed her the book, took stock of her rich clothes, bowed and turned away.... For his imagination it was enough to have met and loved her in that one moment. She had broken down the intellectual detachment in which he lived: the icy solitude in which so painfully he struggled on was at an end.

So quickly had he moved that she was taken by surprise, and he had reached the threshold of the shop before she ran after him and touched him on the arm.

'Please,' she said. 'You have forgotten one thing—the date.'

He wrote the date in the book, and was for going, but she said,—

'I must know more of you if I am to accept your gift.'

'You talk such perfect English,' he said, marvelling at her. 'People do not talk like that nowadays, but a slipshod jargon.'

'I have lived abroad,' she told him, and without more they walked out into the street together, she hugging the book very dose.

They had walked some distance in silence before he spoke.

'Was it by accident that you were in that shop?'

'Oh, no,' said she. 'The old man is a friend of mine.'

(He noticed that she said 'the old' and not as most people did 'the yold.' It was this perfection in her that made her so incredible. To the very finest detail she was perfect and he knew not whether to laugh or to weep.)

'It is absurd,' he said in his heart, 'it can't happen like this. It can't be true.'

Clara had no thought of anything but to make him open up his mind and heart to her, most easily and painlessly to break the taut strain in him.

They turned into a tea-shop in Coventry Street, and he sat glowering at her. A small orchestra was crashing out a syncopated tune. The place was full of suburban people enjoying their escape into a vulgar excitement provided for them by the philanthropy of Joseph Lyons. The

room was all gilt and marble and plentiful electric light. A waitress came up to them, but Rodd was so intent upon Clara that he could not collect his thoughts, and she had to order tea.

'Who are you?' he asked.

'I am an actress at the Imperium.'

He flung back his head and gave a shout of laughter.

'Is it funny?' she asked.

'Very.'

She smiled a little maliciously and asked.—

'Who are you?'

'I'm a queer fish.... I've wasted my life in expecting more from people than they had to give, and in offering them more than they needed.'

'You look tired.'

'I am tired—tired out.... You're not really an actress.'

'I'm paid for it if that makes me one.'

'I mean—you are not playing a part now. Actresses never stop. They take their cues from their husbands and lovers and go on until they drop. Their husbands and lovers generally kick them out before they do that.... The ordinary woman is an actress in her small way, but you are not so at all.... I can't place you. What are you doing in London? You ought not to be in London. You ought to leave us stewing in our own juice.'

The waitress brought them tea and the orchestra flung itself into a more outrageous effort than before.

'Ragtime and you!' he went on. 'They don't blend. Ragtime is for tired brains and jaded senses, for people who have lost all instinct and intuition. What have you to do with them? You will simply beat yourself to death upon their hard indifference.... You are only a child. You should be packed off home.'

'And suppose I have none.'

He shrugged his shoulders.

'That was an impertinence. Forgive me!' He took up the book he had given her. 'This fellow Mann is like all the rest. He wants to substitute a static show for a dynamic and vital performance, to impose his own art upon the theatre. The actors have done that until they have driven anything else out. He wants to drive them out. That is all, but he has great gifts....'

'Please don't talk about other people,' said Clara. 'I want to hear about you. What were you doing in the book-shop?'

He told her then why he went to the Charing Cross Road, to find a holiday which would make life tolerable; she described her holiday touring through the country with the glorious conclusion in the Lakes. He looked rather gloomy and shook his head,—

'That wouldn't suit me. I like to go slowly and to linger over the things that please me, to drink in their real character. It is pleasant to move swiftly, but all this motor-car business seems to me to be only another dodge—running away from life.... I ought to do it if I were true to my temperament, but I love my job too much. I'm an intellectual, but I can't stand by and look on, and I can't run away.'

Clara had never met any one like him before. There was such acute misery in his face, and his words seemed only to be a cloud thrown up to disguise the retreat he was visibly making from her. She would not have that. She was sure of him. This attitude of his was a challenge to her. The force with which he spoke had made Charles and even herself seem flimsy and fantastic, and she wanted to prove that she was or could be made as solid, as definite and precise as himself.

She knew what it was to be driven by her own will. Her sympathy was with him there. He was driven to the point of exhaustion.

'I've been trying to create the woman of the future,' he said. 'Ibsen's women are all nerves. What I want to get is the woman who can detach herself from her emotional experience and accept failure, as a man does, with a belief that in the long run the human mind is stronger than Nature. If instincts are baffled, they are not to be trusted. Women have yet to learn that.... When they learn it, we can begin to get straight.'

It did not seem to matter whether she understood him or not. He had her sympathy, and he

was glad to talk.

'That seems to be the heart of the problem. But it is a little disconcerting, when you have been trying to create a woman, to walk into a bookshop and find her.'

'How do you know?' she asked. 'I may be only acting. That is what women do. They find out by instinct the ideal in a man's mind and reproduce it.'

He shook his head.

'All ideals to all men? ... You have given the game away.'

'That might only be the cleverest trick of all.'

For a moment he was suspicious of her, but this coquetry was noble and designed to please and soothe him.

'I'm in for a bad time,' he said simply. 'Things have been too easy for me so far. I gave myself twenty years in which to produce what I want and what the world must have.... Things aren't so simple as all that.'

'Do drink your tea. I think you take everything too hardly. People don't know that they are indifferent. There are so many things to do, so many people to meet, they are so busy that they don't realise that they are standing still and just repeating themselves over and over again.'

'Damn the orchestra!' said Rodd. The first violin was playing a solo with muted strings. 'If people will stand this, they will stand anything. It is slow murder.'

'Do believe that they like it,' replied Clara.

'Slow murder?'

'No. The—music.'

'Same thing.' He laughed. 'Oh, well. You have robbed me of my occupation. When shall we meet again?'

'To-morrow?'

'To-morrow. You shall see how I live— If you can spare the time I would like to take you to a concert. I always test my friends with music.'

'Even the New Woman?'

His eyes twinkled and a smile played about his sensitive lips.

XII

RODD AT HOME

They met on the morrow, a hot August day, with the heat quivering up from the pavements and the walls of the houses.... Rodd was the first to arrive at the book-shop where they had arranged to meet. The bookseller chaffed him about the 'young leddy,' because Rodd had never been known to speak to any one—male or female, in the shop.

'That's a fine young leddy,' said the bookseller. 'She knows that to do good to others is to do good to yourself. And mind ye, that's a fact. It's not preaching. It's hard scientific fact.'

'Who is she?' asked Rodd.

'She's an actress-girl, and she is friendly with lords. How she came to find a poor shop like mine I cannot tell ye. But in she walked, and my luck turned from that day.'

Clara came in. She stood on the threshold of the shop and turned over the papers that stood there on a table. She had seen Rodd, but wished to gain a moment or two before she spoke to him, so great had been the shock of meeting him. Since leaving him the day before she had done nothing at all but wait for the time to come for her to see him again, but when the time came she had to force her way out of the brooding concentration upon him which absorbed all her energies. She dreaded the meeting. In recollection, his personality had been clearer and more precise to her than in his actual presence, when the force of his ideas obscured everything else. He was unhappy, he was poor, he was solitary, and it angered her that such a man should be any one of these things. He seemed so forceful and yet to be poor, to be unhappy, to be solitary in a

world where, as she had proved, wealth and companionship were so easy of access, argued some weakness.... He waited for her to move, and that angered her. He stood still and waited for her to move. So fierce was the gust of anger in her that she nearly walked out of the shop then and there, but she saw his eyes intent upon her and she went up to him, holding out her hand. He gripped it tightly and said,—

'I was afraid you might not come.'

'Why should I not?'

'I have so little to give you.'

'You gave me a good deal yesterday.'

'Everything.'

The bookseller looked up at the bust of William Morris on his poetry shelves and winked. Then he tip-toed away.

Clara forgave him for not moving to meet her. His directness of speech satisfied her as to his strength and honesty.

Neither was disposed to waste time. Their intimacy had begun at their first meeting.

'It is too hot in London,' he said. 'Shall we walk out to Highgate or Hampstead?'

Clara wanted to touch him, to make certain that he was really a man and not a mere perambulating mind, and she laid her hand on his arm. It was painfully thin, and she knew instinctively that he was not properly cared for, and then again she was full of mistrust. Was it only her sympathy that involved her life with his? ... The shock of it had made it perfectly clear that in Charles, as a man, she had never had the smallest interest. That had been disastrous, and she shrank from creating more trouble by her impetuosity. To hurt this man would be serious. No one could hurt Charles except himself; and even then he would always wake up in the morning singing and whistling like a happy boy or a blackbird in a cherry-tree in blossom.

They went by tube to Highgate, making no attempt to talk through the clatter and roar of the train in the tunnel.

As they walked up the long hill he said,—

'You have knocked me out. I never thought any one would do that. I never thought I should meet any one as strong as myself.... Love's a terrible thing. The impact of two personalities. It breaks everything else, leaves no room for anything else.'

'I hoped it would make you happy,' said Clara, accepting as entirely natural that they should sweep aside everything that stood between them and their desire to be together and to share thoughts, emotions, all the deep qualities in them that could be revealed to no one else. She could no more deny him than she could deny the sun rising in the morning, and for the moment she was content to forget every other element in her life.... It was so inevitably right that, having met in the heart of London, they should turn their backs on it and put themselves to the test of earth, sunshine, blue sky, and trees in their summer green, and water smiling in the sun. The furious energy in their hearts made the hot August day, the suburban scene, and the indolent suburban people seem toy-like and unreal, as though they were looking down upon it from another world, and so they were, for they had plunged to the very beginnings of Creation, and their new world was in the making. So great is the power of love that, extracting all the truth from the world as men have made it, it sweeps the rest away and begins again, discarding, destroying, but most tenderly preserving all that is vital and of worth. Love takes its chosen two, and weaves a spell about them, to preserve them from the fretting contact of the world, that they may have the power to withstand the agony of creation which sweeps through them, and never rests until they are forged into one soul, one world, or parted, broken and cast down.

Of these two it was Rodd who suffered most. The fierce will that had maintained him in his long labours for the art he worshipped would not yield. He wanted both, his work and this sudden, surprising girl who had walked into his life, and he wanted both upon his own terms. At the same time the conflict set up in him made him only the more sensitive to beauty and to the simple delights of the gardens and fields through which they passed.... This was new for him. He had enjoyed such things before only with a remote aesthetic detachment.

This, too, he was loath to renounce, but the swift joy in the girl was too strong for him. To such beauty the sternest will must bend. No bird's song, no sudden light upon a cloud, no trembling flower in its ecstacy, no tree in full burst of blossom could tell of so high a beauty as this joy that flashed from the very depths of her soul into her eyes, upon her lips, softening her throat, liquefying her every movement, and into her voice bringing such music as no poet has ever sung, no musician's brain conceived, music sent from regions deeper than the human soul can know to go soaring far beyond the limits set to human perception.

Rodd was dazed and dizzy with it, and longed every now and then to touch her, to hold her, to

make sure that in the swiftness of her joy she would not fly away.... He talked gravely and solemnly, with an intent concentration, about the persons in his life who compared so sorrily with her. He was obviously composing them into a drama, which, however, he dared not carry to any conclusion. That there could ever be such another day as this was beyond his hopes, that he could ever return to what he was beggared his endurance....

'A queer thing happened to me the other day,' he said. 'I live among strange people, hangers-on of the theatre and the newspaper press. There is a woman——'

Clara caught her breath and looked tigerish. He did not notice the change and went on.

'There is a woman. She lives immediately below me. She has two children and God knows how she lives. She used to wait for me on the stairs in the evening to watch me go up. But I never spoke to her——'

Clara smiled happily.

'She used to do me little services. She would darn my socks, and sometimes cook me some dainty and lay it outside my door. This went on for months, I never spoke to her, because she has a terrible mother who lives with her.... A week or two ago, she met me as I came upstairs in the evening, and told me one of her children was ill, and asked me to go for the doctor.... I did so, and she looked so exhausted that I went in and helped her. The mother was no use at all; a fat, lazy beast of a woman who drinks, swears, eats, and sleeps.... We wrestled with death for the life of the child, but we were beaten.... It died. She waits for me now, and tries to talk to me, but I will not do it. She is frenzied in her attentions. She wants sympathy. She has it, but wants more than that. A word from me, and I should never be able to shake her off. She would cling to me, and because she clung she would believe that she loved me, but she would have nothing but my weakness.... It has happened before. They seem to find some bitter triumph in a man's weakness.'

The humility of his confession touched Clara deeply. It was the humility of the man's feeling, in contrast with his ferocious, intellectual arrogance, that moved her to a compassion which steadied her in her swift joy. His story revealed his life to her so vividly that she felt that without more she knew him through and through. Everything else was detail with which she had no particular concern.

They walked along in silence for some time, he brooding, she smiling happily, and she pictured the two sides of his life, the rich and powerful imaginative activity, and the simple tenderness of his solitude.

It seemed to be her turn to confess, but she could not. The day's perfection would be marred for them, and that she would not have. He would understand. Yes, he would understand, but men have illusions which are very dear to them. She must protect them, and let him keep them until the dear reality made it necessary for him to discard them.

At Hampstead they came on a holiday throng and mingled with them, glad once again to be in contact with simple people taking the pleasures for which they lived. There were swing-boats, merry-go-rounds, cocoa-nut shies, penny-in-the-slot machines.... The proprietor of the merry-go-round was rather like Sir Henry Butcher in appearance, and Clara realised with a start that the Imperium and this gaily painted machine were both parts of the same trade. The people paid their twopence or their half-guineas and were given a certain excitement, a share in a game, a pleasure which without effort on their part broke the monotony of existence.... Of the two on this August day she preferred the merry-go-round. It was in the open air, and it was simple and unpretentious; and it was surely better that the people should be amused with wooden horses than with human beings as mechanical and as miserably driven by machinery.... She was annoyed with Rodd because he was exasperated by the silly giggling of the servant-girls and the raffish capers of the young man.

'I hate the pleasures of the people,' he said. 'They give the measure of the quality of their work—lazy, slovenly, monotonous repetition, producing nothing splendid but machines, wonderful engines, marvellous ships, miraculous motor-cars, but dull, listless, sodden people—inert. It is the inertia of London that is so appalling.'

Clara made him take her on the wooden horses, and they went round three times. He admitted reluctantly that he had enjoyed it.

'But only because you did.'

To try him still further she made him have tea in the yard of an inn, at a long table with a number of East Enders, whole families, courting couples, and young men and maidens who had selected each other out of the crowd. They stared at the remarkable pair, the elegant young woman and the moody, handsome man, but they made no impertinent comment except that when they left a girl shrieked,—

'My! look at her shoes.'

And another girl said mournfully,—

'I wisht I 'ad legs like *that* and silk stockings.'

It was near evening. The haze over the heath shimmered with an apricot glow. Windows, catching the low sun, blazed like patches of fire. The people on the heath dwindled and seemed to sink away into the landscape, and their movements were hardly perceptible.

Rodd asked,—

'Has it been a good day for you?'

'A wonderful day. I want to see where you live.'

He took her home. Down in London, after the Heath, the air seemed thick and stifling. The square in which he lived was surrounded with unsavoury streets from which smells that were almost overpowering were wafted in. His house was a once fashionable mansion now cut up into flats. He had what were once the servants' quarters under the roof, three rooms and a bathroom. The windows of his front room looked out on the tops of trees. Here he worked. The room contained nothing but a table, a chair, a piano, and a sofa.

'This is the only room,' he said.

'That woman was waiting for you,' said Clara.

'Was she? I didn't see her.'

'Yes. She whisked into her room when she saw me.'

He took up his manuscript from the table.

'It has stopped short.' He turned it over ruefully; fingering the pages, he began to read and was sinking into absorption in it when she dashed it out of his hand.

'How dare you read it when I am with you?' she cried. 'It was written before you knew me. It isn't any good.... I know it isn't any good.'

He was stunned by this outburst of jealousy and protested,—

'There's years of work in it.'

'But what's the good of sitting here working, if you never do anything with it?'

He pointed to the sofa and said,—

'There's my work in there: full to the brim, notes, sketches, things half finished, things that need revision.... I've been waiting for something to happen. I could never work just to please other people and to fit successful actors with parts....'

'I'm a successful actress.'

'You? Oh, no.'

'But I am. I'm engaged to appear at the Imperium in *The Tempest*. Charles Mann is designing the production.'

'I saw something about that, but I didn't believe it.'

'Charles Mann's work was like that,' she pointed to the sofa, 'until I met him.'

'You know him?'

'Yes.... Yes.'

(She could not bring herself to tell him.)

'Butcher will be too strong for him. You see, Butcher controls the machine.'

'But money controls Butcher!'

He was enraged.

'You! You to talk of money! That is the secret of the whole criminal business. Money controls art. Money rejects art. Money's a sensitive thing, too. It rejects force, spontaneity, originality. It wants repetition, immutability, things calculable. Money... You can talk with satisfaction of money controlling Butcher after our heavenly day with the sweet air singing of our happiness!'

'One must face facts.'

'Certainly. But one need not embrace them.'

Here in this room he was another man. The humility that was his most endearing quality was

submerged in his creative arrogance. Almost it seemed that he resented her intrusion as a menace to the life which he had made for himself, the world of suffering and tortured creatures with which he had surrounded himself, the creatures whom he had loved so much that contact with his fellows had come to be in some sort a betrayal of them. To an extraordinary degree the atmosphere of the room was charged with his personality, and with the immense continuous effort he had made to achieve his purpose. Here there was something demoniac and challenging in him. He presented this empty room to her as his life and seemed to hurl defiance at her to disturb it.

She had never had so fiercely stimulating a challenge to her personality. In her heart she compared this austere room with the ceremony of the Imperium, and there was no doubt which of the two contained the more vitality. Here in solitude was a man creating that which alone which could justify the elaborate and costly machinery of the great theatre which had been used for almost a generation by the bland and boyish Sir Henry Butcher to exploit his own engaging personality.

Clara was ashamed of the jealousy which had made her snatch Rodd's work out of his hand. It had set his passion raging against her. He who had faced the hostility and indifference of the world all through his ambitious youth was inflamed by the hostility of love which had shaken but not yet uprooted his fierce will—never to compromise, but to adhere to the logic of his vision. The rage in him was intolerable. She said,—

'You don't like it?'

What?'

'My being at the Imperium.'

'It is not for me to like or dislike. I am not the controller of your movements. I would never control the movements of any living creature.'

'Except in your work.'

'They work out their own salvation. They are nothing to do with me, any more than the woman on the stairs.'

'But you love them.'

(He had made them as real to her as they were to himself.)

'They don't leave me alone. They want to live.... But they can only live on the stage.'

He shook back his head and with supreme arrogance he said,—

'As they will when the stage is fit for them.'

She could not bear the strain any longer, and to bring him back to actuality she said,—

'How old are you?'

'Thirty-one.'

His next move horrified her. He stepped forward, seized his manuscript, and tore it into fragments.

'There!' he said, 'are you satisfied?'

'No. That was childish of you.... You will only sit down and begin all over again.'

'I swear I will not. I swear it. It is finished. All that is over.... I don't know how I shall ever begin again. Perhaps I shall not.... All last night I was struggling to get away from it, to avoid facing it.... They're all mean and ignoble and pitiful; brain-sick most of them; and not fit to live in the same world as you. They're not fit to be exhibited on the public stage, these poor nervous little modern people with their dried instincts and their withered thoughts, clever and helpless, rotting in inaction.... No. It has been all wrong. I've been a fool, but I couldn't pretend.... I think I knew it in my head, but it needed you to bring it home to me.... I'm not fit to live in the same world as you. I ought not to have seen you to-day....'

'Can't you laugh at yourself?'

'Laugh! Dear God, I do nothing else.'

'I mean—happily. You wouldn't be you if you didn't make mistakes—to learn. You had to learn more about your work than just the tricks of it. Isn't it so? You despise acting. But it is just the same there. I wanted to learn more about it than the tricks.'

'Ay, that's it; to learn the tricks and keep decent. That is what one stands out for.'

Clara held out her hand to him,—

'Very well, then. We understand each other and there is nothing so very terrible in my being at the Imperium. Is there?'

He held her hand. She wanted him to draw her to him, to hold her close to him, to comfort him for all that he had lost; but once again he was governed by his humility, and he just bowed low, and thanked her warmly for her generosity in giving so poor a devil as himself so exquisite a day.

Nothing was said about another meeting. As he took her down the stairs the door of the flat below was opened and a woman's face peeped out. Near the bottom of the stairs they met a man in a tail coat and top hat who sidled past them, took off his hat and held it in front of his face, but before he did so Clara had recognised Mr Cumberland, erstwhile Mr Clott.

'Does that man live here?' she asked Rodd at the door.

Rodd looked up the stairs.

'No-o,' he said. 'No. I think I have seen him before, but there are many people living in the house. Strange people. They come and go, but I sit there in my room upstairs gazing at the tree-tops, working....'

'You should get in touch with the theatre,' said Clara; 'swallow your scruples, and find out that we are not so very bad after all.'

They stood for some moments on the wide doorstep. It was night now and the lamps were lit. Lovers strolled by under the trees, and against the railings of the garden opposite couples were locked together.

'You turn an August day into Spring,' said Rodd.

Clara tapped his hand affectionately, and, to tear herself away, ran down the square and round the corner. She was quivering in every nerve from the strain of so much conflict, and she was angry with herself for having taken so high a hand with him. He was more to be respected than any man she had ever met, and yet she had—or so she thought—treated him as though he were another Charles. She could not measure the immensity of what had happened to her and her thoughts flew to practical details. What ages it seemed since she had walked blithely crooning: 'This is me in London!' And how odd, how menacing, it was that on the stairs she should have met Mr Clott or Cumberland!

XIII

'THE TEMPEST'

There were still seasons in those days: Autumn, Christmas Holidays, and Spring. In August when the rest of the world was at holiday the theatres, cleaned and renewed for a fresh attempt at the conquest of the multitude (which is unconquerable, going its million different ways), were filled with hopeful, busy people, hoping for success to give them the tranquil easy time and the security which, always looked for, never comes.

The Imperium had been re-upholstered and redecorated, and the fact was duly advertised. Mr Smithson, in the leisure given him by his being relieved of full responsibility for the scenery, had painted a new act-drop, photographs of which appeared in the newspapers. Mr Gillies was interviewed. Sir Henry was interviewed, Charles Mann was interviewed. The ball of publicity was kept rolling merrily. Even Mr Halford Bunn, the famous author whose new play had been put back, lent a hand by attacking the new cranky scenery in the columns of a respectable daily paper, and giving rise to a lengthy correspondence in which Charles came in for a good deal of hearty abuse on the ground that he had given to other countries the gifts that belonged to his own. He plunged into the fray, and pointed out that he had left his own country because it was pleasanter to starve in a sunny climate.

He was intoxicated with anticipation of his triumph. The practical difficulties which he had created, and those which had been put in his way by Mr Gillies and Mr Smithson had been surmounted, and to see his designs in being, actually realised in the large on back-cloths, wings, and gauzes, gave him the sense of solidity which, had it come into his life before, might have made him almost a normal person.... Clara was to be Ariel. The beloved child was to bring the magic of her personality to kindle the beauty he had created in form and colour. He was almost reconciled to the idea of the characters in the fantasy being impersonated by men and women.

Sir Henry had returned to town enthusiastic and eager. Mann and Clara were a combination strong enough to break the tyranny of the social use of the front of the house over the artistic

employment of the stage. This season at all events Lady Butcher and Lady Bracebridge should not have things all their own way.

There was a slight set back and disappointment. An upstart impresario brought over from Germany a production in which form and design had broken down naturalism. This was presented at one of the Halls, and was an instantaneous success, and Charles, in a fit of jealousy, wrote an unfortunately spiteful attack on the German producer, accusing him of stealing his ideas. Sir Henry, a born publicist, was enraged, and threatened to abandon his project. The proper line to take was to welcome the German product and, with an appropriate reference to Perkins and aniline dyes, to point bashfully to what London could do.... He was so furious with Charles that he shut himself up in the aquarium and refused to call rehearsals.

Clara saw him and he reproached her,—

'Why did you bring that dreadful man into my beautiful theatre? He has upset everybody from Gillies to the call-boy, and now he has made us a laughing-stock, and this impresario person is in a position to say that we are jealous. We artists have to hold together or the business men will bowl us out like a lot of skittles, and where will the theatre be then?... Where would you be, my dear? They'd make you take off your clothes and run about the stage with a lot of other young women, and call that—art.... The theatre is either a temple or it is in Western Civilisation what the slave-market is in the East. This damned fool of yours can't see anything outside his own scenery. He thinks he is more important than me; but is a bookbinder more important than John Galsworthy?'

'You mustn't be so angry. Nobody takes Charles seriously except in his work. Everybody expects him to do silly things. You can easily put it right with a dignified letter.'

'But I can't say my own scene-painter is a confounded idiot.'

'You needn't mention him,' said Clara. 'Just say how much you admire the German production and talk about the renaissance of the theatre.'

Sir Henry pettishly took pen and paper, wrote a letter, and handed it to her.

'Will that do?' he asked.

She read it, approved, and admired its adroitness. There were compliments to everybody and Charles was not mentioned.

'These things *are* important,' said Sir Henry. 'The smooth running of the preliminary advertising is half the battle. It gives you your audiences for the first three weeks, and it inspires confidence in the Press. That is most important.... I really was within an ace of throwing the whole thing up. Lady Butcher would like nothing better.'

'I think Verschoyle would be offended if you did.'

'Ah! Verschoyle....' Sir Henry looked suspiciously at her. Though he wanted to be, he was never quite at his ease with her. She was not calculable like the women he had known. What they wanted were things definite and almost always material, while her purposes were secret, subtle, and, as he sometimes half suspected, beyond his range. She was new. That was her fascination. She belonged to this strange world that was coming into being of discordant rhythmic music, of Russian ballet and novels, of a kind of poetry that anybody could write, of fashions that struck him as indecent, of a Society more riotous and rowdy than ever the Bohemia of his day had been, because women—ladies too—were the moving spirit in it and women never did observe the rules of any game.... And yet, in his boyish, sentimental way, he adored her, and clung to her as though he thought she could take him into this new world.

'I can't go on with Mann,' he said almost tearfully. 'It is too disturbing. You never know what he is going to do, and, after all, the theatre is a business, isn't it?— Isn't it?'

'I suppose so,' replied Clara.

It was extraordinary to feel the great machine of the theatre gathering momentum for the launching of the play. It was marvellous to be caught up, as the rehearsals proceeded, into the loveliest fantasy ever created by the human mind. Clara threw herself into it heart and soul. Life outside the play ceased for her. She lived entirely between her rooms and the stage of the theatre. Unlike the other players, when she was not wanted she was watching the rest of the piece, surrendered herself to it completely, and was continually discovering a vast power of meaning in words that had been so familiar to her as to have become like remembered music, an habitual thought without conscious reference to anything under the sun.... And as her sense of the beauty of the play grew more living to her, so she saw the apparatus that kept it in motion as more and more comic.... Mr Gillies had a thousand and one points on which he consulted his chief with the most ruthless disregard of the work going forward on the stage. Lady Butcher would come bustling in, take Sir Henry aside and whisper to him, and words like Bracebridge—Sir George—Lady Amabel—Prime Minister—Chancellor—would come hissing out. Then when the rehearsal was resumed she would stay surveying it with the indulgent smile of a vicar's wife at a school treat.... During the exquisite scene between Prospero and Miranda one day the scenery

door was flung open, and Mr Smithson arrived with a small army of men, who dumped paint-pots on the boards, threw hammers down, and rushed across the stage with flats and fly-cloths. Yet, in spite of all these accidents introducing the spirit of burlesque, the play survived. Sir Henry would tolerate interruptions up to a point, but, when a charwoman in the auditorium started brushing or turned on a sudden light, he would turn and roar into the darkness,—

'Stop that din! How can I rehearse if I am continually distracted! Go away and clean somewhere else! We can't be clean now.... Please go on.'

The cast was a good one of very distinguished and highly paid players, all the principals being ladies and gentlemen who would rather not work than accept less than twenty or twenty-five pounds a week. One or two were superior young people who affected to despise the Imperium, but confessed with a smile that the money was very useful. They were also rather scornful of Charles because he was not intellectual.

Charles at first attended rehearsals and attempted to interfere, but was publicly rebuked and told to mind his own business. There would have been a furious quarrel, but Clara went up to him and dragged him away just in time. He stayed away for some days, but returned and sat gloomily in the auditorium. He had moved from his furnished house, and was in rooms above a ham and beef shop, which, he said, had the advantage of being warm.

'It isn't a production,' he grumbled, 'it's a scramble. He's ruining the whole thing with his acting, which is mid-Victorian. He should key the whole thing up from you, chicken.... You know what I want. You understand me. The technique of the rest is all wrong. It is a technique to divert attention from the scenery, raw, unmitigated barn-storming.... Do, do ask him to let me help! What can he do, popping in and out of the play and discussing a hundred and one things with all these fools who keep running in?'

'You should have stipulated for it in your contract,' she said. 'It is too late now. He does know his business, Charles, if only people would leave him alone.'

So rehearsals went on for a few more days. Clara was more and more absorbed. The magical reality of Ariel surpassed everything else in her life except the memory of Rodd in his empty room, and that also she wished to obliterate, for she was full of a premonition of danger, and was convinced that by this dedication of herself to the theatre she could dominate it. She could not define the danger, but it threatened Charles, and it menaced Rodd, whom she had decided not to see again.

Sir Henry was delighted with her, and said she had rejuvenated his own art.

'I used to play Caliban,' he said. 'But Prospero is the part if there is to be an Ariel who can move as you can move and speak in a fairy voice as you can speak.... The rest of the play is all in the day's work....

> 'Go make thyself like a nymph of the sea: be subject
> To no sight but thine and mine, invisible
> To every eyeball else.'

And for Clara it was almost literally true. She felt that she was like a spirit moving among these people marooned on this island of the West End of London, all spell-bound by the money of this great roaring city, all enslaved, all amphibious, living between two elements, the actual and the imagined, but in neither, because of the spell that bound them, fully and passionately.... Living in the play she saw Sir Henry merged in Prospero, and when he said,—

> 'Thou shalt be as free
> As mountain winds: but then exactly do
> All points of my command,'

she took that also literally, and was blissfully happy to surrender to a will more potent than her own.... She did not know that the will she was acknowledging was Shakespeare's, and that with her rare capacity for living in the imagination she was creeping into his and accepting life, gaining her freedom, upon his terms.

After some time her spirit began to affect the whole company. She created an enchantment in which all moved, and Charles, watching, began to understand more fully the art he had first perceived in her on the day when he had attempted to force her, like a practised hand, to capture and fix an apparently accidental effect.... It was no accident. The girl was possessed with a rare dramatic genius, entirely unspoiled—pure enough and strong enough to subsist and to move in the theatrical atmosphere of the Imperium.... What was more, Charles understood that she was fighting for his ideas, and was, before his eyes, making their fulfilment possible.

You might talk and argue with Sir Henry until you were blue in the face, but give him a piece of real acting and he understood at once, was kindled and became fertile in invention, even courageous in innovation. Give him that, and he would drop all thought of the public and the newspapers, and sacrifice even the prominence of his own personality to the service of this art that he adored. As the rehearsals proceeded, therefore, he became more intent, was less patient

with interruptions, and at last stopped them altogether. He became interested in his own part, and tussled with the players who shared his scenes with him.

'Never,' he said to Clara, 'have I enjoyed rehearsals so much as these. I am only afraid they are going too smoothly. We shall be over-ripe by production....'

He resumed cordial relations with Charles, and threw out a suggestion or two as to scenery and costumes which Charles, who had begun to learn the elements of diplomacy, pretended to note down. Sir Henry was magnanimous. He avoided his wife and his usual cronies, and devoted himself to Charles and Clara, whom his showman's eye had marked down as potentially a very valuable property.

'This should be the beginning of great things for you, my boy,' he said to Charles. 'You will have all the managers at your feet, but the Imperium is the place for big work, the bold attack, the sweeping line....'

Charles was a little suspicious of such whole-hearted conversion. He knew these enthusiasms for the duration of rehearsals, and he was ill-at-ease because his anticipation of boundless wealth had not come true. He had spent his advance and could not get another out of Mr Gillies, who detested him and regarded his invasion of the theatre as a ruinous departure from its traditions. Clara Mr Gillies considered to be merely one of his Chief's infatuations. They never lasted very long. He had seen his Chief again and again rush to the very brink of disaster, but always he had withdrawn in the nick of time.... Mr Gillies was like a perpetual east wind blowing upon Charles's happiness. But for Mr Gillies there would have been boundless wealth.... It was monstrous: Verschoyle had backed Charles's talent and Mr Gillies was sitting on the money. Butcher could spend it royally, but Charles had often to go to Clara and ask her for the price of his lunch. At the very height of his fame, with success almost within his grasp, he had to go almost hungry because genius has no credit.

There was nothing to be done about it. He borrowed here and there, but knew it was no real help. It simply sent rumours flying as to his financial position, and he did not want either Butcher or Verschoyle to know that money trickled through his fingers. He wanted their support after this success to advance his schemes. Therefore he borrowed from Clara, and she, entirely indifferent to all but the engrossing development of the play, allowed Sir Henry to pay for her food, to give her meals alone with him in the aquarium, and even to buy her clothes and jewels. She took not the slightest interest in them, but, as it seemed to give him pleasure to shower gifts and attentions upon her, she suffered it, and never for a moment dreamed of the turn his infatuation was taking.

As she progressed in her work she felt that she was achieving what she desired, a passion for her art equal to Rodd's. For a time she had thrust all thought of him aside, but as she gained in mastery and power over the whole activity of the stage, he crept back into her mind, and she could face him with a greater sense of equality, with more understanding and without that jealousy the memory of which hurt her.... She had acquired a sense of loyalty to art which was a greater thing than loyalty to Charles. She had saved him, helped him, brought him thus far. Henceforth he must learn to stand on his own feet. She was glad that she had left him.

All these considerations seemed very remote as she worked her way deeper and deeper into the play, which contained for her a reality nowhere to be found in life. She became Ariel, a pure imagination, moving in an enchanted air, singing of freedom and of a beauty beyond all things visible.

> 'You are three men of sin, whom Destiny
> That hath to instrument this lower world
> And what is in't, the never-surfeited sea
> Hath caused to belch up you; and on this island
> Where man doth not inhabit...'

Casting spells upon others, she seemed to cast them upon her own life; and it was incredible to her to think that she was the same Clara Day who had come so gaily to London with Charles Mann to help him to conquer his kingdom. The stage of the Imperium was to her, in truth, a magic island where wonders were performed, and she by an inspiration, more powerful than her own will, could with a touch transform all things and persons around her; and when Sir Henry, rehearsing the character of Prospero, said to her.—

> 'Then to the elements
> Be free and fare you well.'

the words sounded deep in her heart, and she took them as a real bidding to be free of all that had entangled and cramped her own life. So she dreamed.

She had a rude awakening one night when, after a supper in the aquarium alone with Sir Henry, he broke a long moody silence by laying his hand on hers, drawing her out of her chair and clasping her to his heart while he kissed her arms, shoulders, face, hair, and cried,—

'You wonderful, wonderful child. I love you. I love you. I have loved you since I first saw you. I knew then that the love of my life had come.... You wonderful untouched child——'

He tried to make her kiss him, to force her to meet his eyes, but she wrestled with him and thrust him back to relinquish his hold.

'How could you? How could you! How could you?' she asked.

'I have never forgotten that marvellous moonlit night——'

'Please be sensible,' she said. 'Does a man never know when a woman loves him or not?'

'They don't help one much,' replied Sir Henry, with a nervous grin. 'You were so happy.... I thought. Don't be angry with me! I have thought of nothing but you since then....'

'A moonlight night and champagne supper,' said she. 'Are they the same thing to you?'

'Love conquers all,' said Sir Henry, a little sententiously. He was disgusted. She was not playing the right dramatic part; but she never did any of the expected things. The ordinary conventions of women did not exist for her.

She had moved as far away from him as possible and was standing over by the portrait of Teresa Chesney.

'You must never talk like that again,' she said, 'or I shall not stay in the theatre.... It is not only the vulgarity of it that I hate, but that you should have misunderstood.... I was happy to be working with you in the play. Everything outside that is unimportant.'

'Not love.... Not love,' protested Sir Henry.

'Even love,' she said.

'I thought you liked me,' he mumbled. 'I was so happy giving you presents. I thought you liked me.... A man in my position doesn't often find people to like him.'

'So I do,' said Clara. 'You are very like Charles. That is why I understand you.'

Sir Henry winced. In his heart he thoroughly despised Charles Mann. He drank a glass of champagne and said nervously,—

'I'm glad we're not going to quarrel.... Forgive me.'

'You have spoiled it all for me,' she said. 'Everything is spoiled.'

She clenched her fists, and her eyes blazed fury at him.

'How dare you treat me as a woman when I had never revealed myself to you? Isn't that where a man should have some honour? ... You must understand me if I am to remain in the theatre. If a woman reveals herself to a man, then she is responsible. She has nothing to say if—I don't think you understand.'

'No.' And indeed she might have been talking Greek to him. The insulted woman he knew, the virtuous woman he knew, the fraudulent coquette he knew, the extravagant self-esteem of women he knew, but never before had he met a woman who was simple and sincere, who could brush aside all save essentials and talk to him as a man might have done, with detachment from the thing that had happened.

'If you think I'm a blackguard, why don't you say so? Why don't you hit me?'

'I don't think you are anything of the kind. I think you have been spoiled and that everything has been too easy for you.... I'm hurt because I thought you wanted Charles and me for the theatre and not for yourself.'

'*L'etat c'est moi*,' smiled Sir Henry. 'I am the theatre.... All the immense machinery is my creation. My brain here is the power that keeps it going. If I were to die to-morrow there would be four walls and Mr Gillies.... Do you think he could do anything with it? Could Charles Mann? Could you?'

'Yes,' said Clara, and he laughed. He had never been in such entrancing company. If she did not want his love-making—well and good. At least she gave him the benefit of her frankness and he needed no pose with her. He was glad she was going to be a sensible girl.... She might alter her mind and every day only made her more adorable.

'Sit down and have some chocolates.' He spoke to her as though she were a child and like a child she obeyed him, for she was alarmed that he should exert his capricious prerogative and throw over *The Tempest* at the last moment.

'What would you do with the theatre?'

'I should dismiss Mr Gillies.'

'An excellent man of business.'

'For stocks and shares or boots, but not for art.'

'He's a steadying influence.'

'Art is steady enough, if it is art.'

'My *dear* child!'

'If you don't know that then you are not an artist.'

'Oh! Would you call Charles Mann steady?'

'I should think of the play first and last.'

'There's no one to write them.'

'I should scour the country for imaginative people and make them think in terms of the theatre. Besides, there are people!'

'Oh!'

'Yes. There are people who love the drama so much that they can't go near the theatre.'

He roared with laughter, and to convince him she told him about Adnor Rodd and his bare room, where without any hope of an audience he wrote his plays and lived in them more passionately than it was possible to do in life.

Sir Henry shook his head.

'I don't mind betting,' he said, 'that he's got something wrong with him. Either he drinks, or has an impossible wife, or he likes low company, or— No. There aren't such people.'

'But there are.' And she told him how she had spent a whole day with Rodd and had gone home with him to see his rooms.

'Alone?' asked Sir Henry.

'Yes.'

'Then if you were my girl I should put you on bread and water for a week.'

To convince him, she tried to tell him how she had struggled to overcome Charles's objections to the practical use of his talent, and had forced him to come to London.... In her eagerness and in her happiness at having brought him to his senses, she lost sight of the fact that she was revealing her own history. He brought her up sharp with,—

'Are you married to Charles Mann?'

'Ye-es,' she said, her heart fluttering.

'I didn't know,' he replied nonchalantly. His manner towards her changed. He was still soft and kind, and bland in his impish wit, but beneath the surface he was brutal, revengeful, cruel, and she felt the force of the ruthless egoism that had won him his position in spite of disabilities which would have hampered and even checked a less forceful man.... In the same moment she understood that what had been a glorious and lovely reality to her had been a game to him; and that he designed without the slightest compunction to turn both Charles and herself to his own profit.... Well, she thought, he might try, but he could not prevent either of them from making their reputations, and neither would ever sink to the mechanical docility of London players.

Sir Henry lit a large cigar and moved over to the fire.

'What does Verschoyle think of it?'

She knew that he was insolently referring to her marriage with Charles, but she turned the shaft by saying,—

'He is delighted with it all. He believes in Charles.'

'Hm.... Even the birds and fishes?'

'Who told you about that?'

'London doesn't let a good story die.'

'Verschoyle was present....'

'Oh!'

The situation was becoming unbearable. Sir Henry was as hard, as satisfied, and as

unconscionable as a successful company-promoter. This sudden revelation of his egoism, his wariness to protect the ideal which in his own person he had achieved, shocked Clara out of her youthful innocence and into a painful realisation that the facts of her life forbade the impersonalism which had made so much achievement possible.... It was quite clear to her that Sir Henry was intent upon a personal relationship if she were to keep what she had won, and it was as clear that he could not credit her, or Charles, or anybody else with any other motive than personal ambition. He knew his world, he knew his theatre. A fulfilled ambition has its price, and he had never yet met the successful man or woman who did not pay with a good grace, as he himself had done.

Her brain worked quickly on this new intractable material, this disconcerting revelation of the fact that success and art are in the modern world two very different things, the one belonging to the crowd, the other to solitude.... This old man might have waited. He might have given her her chance. It was not true. She would not accept that it could be true that she could only have her success at his price, the price that he had paid, he and all the others, Julia Wainwright, Freeland Moore, and the loss of respect and simple humanity.... So this was why Charles had run away from the theatre. Certain things, certain elements in human character were too holy to be set before the crowd.

She remembered her early struggles when she first went into the theatre. She had won through them and had thought herself victorious only to find herself confronted once more with the hard actualities: either to accept the intrusion of the personal element into what should be impersonal service or to acknowledge defeat.... She could do neither the one nor the other.

If only she could weep. The woman in her calculated. If only she could weep! But where another woman would have wept she could not. She could only turn to her will and draw further strength from that. It was so maddening, so silly, that play acting should entail such a price. It was making it all too serious. What after all was it? Just the instinct of play organised, and what was play without a happy joy? If only she would weep, the obstinate old man clinging to his success would melt; he would be kind; he would forgo all this nonsense that had been buzzing in his scatter brain.... What he could not stand was sincerity and a will diverted to other purposes than his own.... It made her tremble with rage to think that all his enthusiasm for the play, the real work he had put into rehearsals, his snubbing of Mr Gillies and his wife, had all been only because he fancied himself in his blown vanity to be in love with her. It was too ridiculous, and despising him, hating herself, she decided that if it was acting he wanted, acting he should have, and she burst into a torrent of tears conjured up out of an entirely fictitious emotion.... At once Sir Henry had the cue he was waiting for.... He leaped up and came over to her with his hand on his heart.

Don't cry, little girl,' he said. 'Don't cry.... Harry is with you. Harry only wants to be kind to her, and to help his poor little girl in her trouble.... She shall be the greatest actress in the world.'

'Never!' thought Clara, her brain working more clearly now that she had set up this screen of tears between them.

He patted her hand and caressed her hair, and was sublimely happy again. He had half expected trouble from this unaccountable and baffling creature, whose will and wits were stronger than his own. He was still a little suspicious, but he took her tears for acquiescence in his plans for her, and holding her in his arms he had the intense satisfaction of thinking of Charles Mann as a filthy blackguard for whom shooting was too clean an end.

XIV

VERSCHOYLE FORGETS HIMSELF

Lord Verschoyle had imagined that by making for Art he would be able to shake free of predatory designs. It was not long before he discovered his mistake and that he had plunged into the very heart of the Society which he desired to avoid, for the Imperium, as used by Lady Butcher and Lady Bracebridge, was a powerful engine in the politico-financial world which dominated London. Verschoyle in his simplicity had seen the metropolis as consisting of purposeful mammas and missish daughters bearing down upon him from all sides. Now he discovered that there was more in it than that and that marriage was only one of many moves in a complicated game.... Lady Bracebridge had a daughter. Lady Butcher had a son whom she designed for a political career, upon which he had entered as assistant secretary to an under-secretary. Perceiving that Verschoyle easily lost his head, as in his apparent relations with Clara Day, they designed to draw him into political society where heads are finally and irrevocably lost.... He loathed politics and could not understand them, but young Butcher haunted him, and Lady Bracebridge cast about him a net of invitations which he could find no way of evading. They justified themselves by saying that it was necessary to save him from Clara, and he found himself

drawn further and further away, and more and more submitted to an increasing pressure, the aim of which seemed to be to commit him to supporting the Imperium and the Fleischmann group which had some mysterious share in its control.... He knew enough about finance to realise that there was more in all this than met the eye, and upon investigation he found that the Fleischmann group were unloading Argentines all over monied London, and in due course he was offered a block of shares which, after an admirable dinner at the Bracebridges, he amiably accepted.

The network was too complicated for him to unravel, but, as the result of putting two and two together, he surmised that the Imperium must have been losing rather more than it was worth to the Fleischmann group, and that therefore sacrifice must be offered up. He was the sacrifice. He did not mind that. It would infuriate his trustees when at last he had to give them an account of this adventure, but he did object to Charles and Clara being used to make a desperate bid to revive the languishing support of the public.

Charles and Clara were so entirely innocent of all intrigue. They gave simply what was in them without calculation of future profit, and with the most guileless trust in others, never suspecting that they were not as simple as themselves. Therefore Verschoyle cursed his own indolence which had committed him both to the Imperium and the Fleischmann group.

As he pondered the problem, he saw that Charles and Clara could be dropped, and probably would be as soon as it was convenient. The real controller of the Imperium was Lady Bracebridge, whose skill in intrigue was said to be worth ten thousand a year to Sir Julius Fleischmann. She played upon Lady Butcher, Lady Butcher played upon Sir Henry, who, with Mr Gillies crying 'Give, give,' was between the upper and the nether millstone, and could only put up a sham fight.... Verschoyle understood, too late, that *The Tempest* was to be produced not to present Clara and Charles to the British public, but to capture himself. Like a fool, in his eagerness to help Clara, he had let himself be captured, and now he thought he owed her amends.... He did not know how difficult the situation had become. The danger point, as he saw the problem, was her position with regard to Charles, who, fortunately, respected her wishes and made no attempt to force her hand. All the same there the awkward fact was and at any moment might trip her up.

Verschoyle did not mind a scandal, and he did not care a hang whether Charles went to prison or not. It might give him the instruction in the elementary facts of existence which he needed to make him learn to begin at the beginning instead of the middle or the end.... What Verschoyle dreaded was a sudden shock which might blast the delicate bud of Clara's youth, which to him was far more precious than any other quality, and the only thing which in all his life had moved him out of his timid dilettantism. To him it was a more valuable thing than the whole of London, and compared with its vivid reality the Imperium, with its firm hold on the affections of the public, and its generation of advertising behind it, was a blown bubble.

He had tea with her on the day after her supper with Sir Henry, and found her disastrously altered, hurt, and puzzled.

'What is the matter?' he asked. 'Rehearsals not going well?'

'Oh, yes. They are going very well.... But I am worried about Charles. He has been borrowing money again.'

'Will you be happy again if I promise to look after Charles?'

'He ought not to expect to be looked after. He is very famous now, and should be able to make money.'

'Surely, like everything else, it is a matter of practice. You don't expect him to beat Sir Henry at his own game.'

'No-o,' she said. 'But I think I did expect Charles's game to beat Sir Henry's.'

'Surely it has done so.'

'No.'

They were in her rooms, which were now most charmingly furnished; bright, gay, and delicate in colouring, tranquil and cosy with books.

'Has anything happened?'

She told him.

'I thought it was going to be so simple. I felt that Charles and I were irresistible, and that we should conquer the theatre and make people admit that he is—what he is. Nothing can alter that. But it isn't simple at all. Other people want other things. They go on wanting the horrible things they have always wanted, and they expect us to help them to procure them. They don't understand. They think we want the same things.... I never thought I should be so unhappy. When it comes to the point they won't let the real things in people be put before the public.'

'Oh, come. He is just a vain old man who gets through his position what he could never have got for himself.'

'No, no, no,' she protested. 'It does mean what I say. It has made me hate the theatre and understand why Charles ran away from it.... Only, having forced him so far, what can I do? I have hurt him far more than he has hurt me. He was quite happy drifting from town to town abroad, and it was the life I had been brought up to, because my grandfather ran away from England, too. It wouldn't have mattered there how many wives Charles had in England.... But I wanted to see for myself, and I didn't want him to be wasted.... I can see perfectly well that Sir Henry wants if possible to discredit him and to prove that his ideas won't work.... We've all been very silly. These people are too clever for us. He's got your money and Charles's genius, and neither of you can raise a finger.'

Verschoyle looked rueful. He could not deny it.

'It's that damned old Bracebridge,' he said. 'She doesn't care a twopenny curse for art or for the public. She and her lot want any money that is floating loose and the whole social game in London has become a three-card trick in their hands. The theatre and newspapers are just the sharper's patter.'

Clara writhed.

'You can't do anything but go on,' he said. 'You are bound to get your success and they can't deny that. The old man knows that. Hence the trick to get you away from Charles.... If you succeed you'll pull Charles through, and—we can buy off anybody who wants to make trouble. I'll buy the Bracebridges, if necessary. I'm not particularly proud of my money. It comes from land for which I do absolutely nothing, but it's better than Fleischmann money which is got by the trickery of a lottery.'

'She's a horrible old woman,' said Clara.

'She intends that I shall marry her hen-brain of a daughter.... If the worst came to the worst, my dear, you could marry me.'

Clara was enraged. It infuriated her that he, of all people, whom she had so entirely trusted, should so far forget himself as to propose so trite and sentimental a solution. He could not help teasing her.

'It would save me, too,' he said. 'And as Lady Verschoyle you could give these people a Roland for their Oliver every time.'

'But I want to ignore them,' she said. 'Why won't you see that I don't want to win with my personality but with my art. That should be the irresistible thing.'

'It would be if they resisted it, but they don't. They ignore it.... I can't think of anything else, my dear. They've got my money: ten thousand in the Imperium and twenty in Argentinos, and they are using my name for all they are worth.'

'And if I hadn't asked you to stay after the birds and fishes it wouldn't have happened.'

'After all, it hasn't come to disaster yet.'

'But it will. It is all coming to a head, and Charles will have to be the one to suffer for it.'

'I promise you he shan't. He shall have a dozen committees and all the birds and fishes he requires.'

She could not help laughing. Perhaps, after all, her fears were exaggerated, but she dreaded Charles's helpless acquiescence in the plight to which he had been reduced by Mr Gillies's refusal to advance him a penny outside the terms mentioned in the contract.

'It certainly looks to me,' said Verschoyle, 'as if they wanted to break him. It wouldn't be any good my saying anything. They would simply point to their contract and shrug their shoulders at Charles's improvidence. How much did Mr Clott get away with?'

'A great deal. He had several hundreds in blackmail before he went. That is why we can't prosecute.'

Verschoyle whistled.

'It is a tangled skein,' he said. 'You'd much better marry me. I won't expect you to care for me.'

'Don't be ridiculous——'

There came a heavy thudding at the door, and Clara jumped nervously to her feet. Verschoyle opened the door, and Charles swept in like a whirlwind. His long hair hung in wisps about his face, his hat was awry, his cuffs hung down over his hands, his full tie was out over his waistcoat,

and in both hands he held outstretched his walking stick and a crumpled piece of paper. He dropped the stick and smoothed the paper out on the table, and, in an almost sobbing voice, he said,—

'This has come. It is a wicked plot to ruin me. She demands a part in *The Tempest* or she will inform the police.... O God, chicken, that was a bad day when you made me marry you.'

Verschoyle picked up his stick and, beside himself with exasperated fury, laid about the unhappy Charles's shoulders and loins crying,—

'You hound, you cur, you filthy coward! You should have told her! You should have told her! You knew she was only a child!'

Charles roared lustily, but made no attempt to defend himself, although he was half a head taller than Verschoyle and twice as heavy. He merely said,—

'Oo-oh!' when a blow got home, and waited until the onslaught was over. Then he rubbed himself down and wriggled inside his clothes.

Clara stood aghast. It was horrible to her that this should have happened. Blows were as useless as argument with Charles.... He had done what he had done out of kindliness and childish obedience and, looking to motives rather than to results, could see no wrong in it.

Verschoyle was at once ashamed of himself.

'I lost my temper,' he said, and Charles, assured that the storm was over, smiled happily, ran his hands through his hair and said,—

'Do you think Sir Henry would give her a part?'

Verschoyle flung back his head and shouted with laughter. Such innocence was a supreme joke, especially coming after the serious conversation in which he and Clara had aired their fears as to the result of their incursion into theatrical politics.

'She used to be quite pretty,' added Charles. 'What delightful rooms you have, my dear. They're not so warm as my ham and beef shop.'

'Listen to me, Charles,' said Verschoyle. 'This is serious. I don't care about you. Nothing could hurt you. I don't believe you know half the time what is going on under your nose, but it is vitally serious for Clara. This business must be stopped.... If we can't buy these people off then I'll give you two hundred to clear out.'

'Clear out?' faltered Charles, 'but—my *Tempest* is just coming on. I'm——'

Verschoyle took up the letter and noted the address, one of the musical comedy theatres.

'Have you heard from Mr Clott lately?'

'No. His name is Cumberland now, you know. He came into money. He said he would come back to me when I had my own theatre.'

'Theatre be damned. I wanted to know if he's still blackmailing you.'

'Blackmail? Oh, no.'

'Don't you mind people blackmailing you?'

'If people are made like that.'

'Ah!' Verschoyle gave an indescribable gurgle of impatience. 'Look here, Mann, do try to realise the position. You can't get rid of this woman whatever she does because you have treated marriage as though you could take a wife as if it were no more than buying a packet of cigarettes.'

'I have never thought of Clara as my wife.'

'How then?'

'As Clara,' said Charles simply. 'She is a very great artist.'

Verschoyle was baffled, but Clara forgave Charles all his folly for the sake of his simplicity. It was true. The mistake was hers. What he said was unalterably true. She was Clara Day, an artist, and he had loved her as such. As woman he had not loved her or any other.... What in the ordinary world passed for love simply did not exist for him at all.

She turned to Verschoyle.

'Please do what you can for us,' she said. 'And Charles, please don't try to think of it in anybody else's way but your own. I won't let them send you to prison. They don't want to do that.

They would much rather have you great and powerful so as to bleed you....'

'It has been very wonderful since you came, chicken,' he said. 'I'm ten times the man I was. It seems so stupid that because we went into a dingy office and gabbled a few words we shouldn't be able to be together.... I sometimes wish we were back in France or Italy in a studio, with a bird in a cage, and you dancing about, making me laugh with happiness....'

'I'll see my lawyer,' said Verschoyle.

'For Heaven's sake, don't!' cried Clara. 'Once the lawyers get hold of it, they'll heap the fire up and throw the fat on it.'

'I'm sorry I forgot myself.... You're a good fellow, Charles, but so damned silly that you don't deserve your luck.'

They shook hands on it and Verschoyle withdrew, leaving Charles and Clara to make what they could of the confusion in which they were plunged.... Charles's way out of it was simply to ignore it. If people would not or could not live in his fancy world, so much the worse for them. He did not believe that anything terrible could happen to him simply because, though calamities of the most serious nature had befallen him, he had hardly noticed them. He could forget so easily. He could withdraw and live completely within himself.

He sat at the table and began to draw, and was immediately entirely absorbed.

'Don't you feel it any more than that, Charles?' she asked.

'If people like to make a fuss, let them,' he said. 'It is their way of persuading themselves that they are important.... If they put me in prison, I should just draw on the walls with a nail, and the time would soon go by. The difference between us and them is that they are in a hurry and we are not. There won't be much left of my *Tempest* by the time they've done with it.... The electricians have secret instructions from Butcher. There was nothing about lighting in my contract, so it is to be his and not mine, as if a design could stand without the lighting planned for it.... There are to be spot-lines on Sir Henry and Miranda and you, if he is still pleased with you....'

Charles was talking in a cold, unmoved voice, but she knew that there must have been a furious tussle. She was up in arms at once,—

'It is disgraceful!' she cried. 'What is the good of his pretending to let you work in his theatre if you can have nothing as you wish it?'

'He believes in actors,' said Charles, 'People with painted faces and painted souls, people whose minds are daubed with paint, whose eyes are sealed with it, whose ears are stopped with it....'

'Am I one of them?' she asked plaintively.

'No! Never! Never!' he said, looking up from his drawing. 'They'll turn us into a success, chicken, but they won't let us do what we want to do.... I shan't go near the place again. But you are Ariel, and without you there can be no *Tempest*.'

'I'll go through with it,' she said, her will setting. 'I'll go through with it, and I'll make nonsense of everything but you.... You've done all you can, Charles. Just go on working. That's the only thing, the only thing....'

As she said these words, she thought of Rodd with an acute hostility that amounted almost to hatred. It was the meeting with him that had so confounded all her aims, that sudden plunge into humanity with him that had so exposed her to love that even Verschoyle's tone had changed towards her.... With Charles, love was as impersonal as a bird's song. It was only a call to her swift joy and claimed nothing for himself, though, perhaps, everything for his art. That was where he was so baffling. He expected the whole world to accept service under his banner, and was so confident that in time it would do so that no rebuff ruffled him.

Clara was tempted to accept his point of view, and to run all risks to serve him; but she realised now, as he did not, the forces arrayed against him. There was no blinking the fact that what the Butcher-Bracebridge combination detested was being forced to take him seriously: him or anything else under the sun. Even the public upon which they fawned was only one of several factors in their calculations.

'It will all come right, Charles,' she said. 'I am sure it will all come right. We won't give in. They have diluted you——'

'Diluted?' he exclaimed. 'Butchered!'

She admired him for accepting even that, but, in spite of herself, it hurt her that he still had no thought for her, but to him only artistic problems were important. The problems of life must be left to solve themselves. She could not help saying,—

'You ought not to leave everything to me, Charles.'

'You can handle people. I can't. I thought I was going to be rich, but there's no money. And even if this affair is a success I shall be ashamed of it.... I think I shall write to the papers and repudiate it. But it is the same everywhere. People take my ideas and vulgarise them. Actors are the same everywhere. They will leave nothing to the audience. They want to be adored for the very qualities they have lost.'

'You don't blame me, then?'

'Blame? What's the good of blaming any one. It doesn't help. It makes one angry. There is a certain pleasure in that, but it doesn't help.'

It was brought home to her, then, that all her care for his helplessness was in vain. He neither needed nor looked for help. It was all one to him whether he lived in magnificence in a furnished house or in apartments over a cook-shop.

'I've a good mind to disown the whole production now,' he said.

'No. No. They will do all they can to hurt you then.... I think they know.'

'Know what?'

'That you have a wife.'

He brought his fist down with such a crash on the frail table that it cracked right across, and Clara was sickeningly alarmed when she saw his huge hands grip the table on either side and rend it asunder. There was something terrible and almost miraculous in his enormous physical vitality, and his waste of it now in such a petty act of rage forced her to admit that which she had been attempting to suppress, the thought of Rodd, and she was compelled now to compare the two men. So she saw Charles more clearly, and had to acknowledge to herself how fatally he lacked moral force. She trembled as it was made plain to her that the old happy days could never come again, and that the child who had believed in him so implicitly was gone for ever. She had the frame, the mind, the instinct of a woman, and these things could no longer be denied.

When his rage was spent, she determined to give him one more chance,—

'We can win through, Charles. We have Verschoyle backing us. I accept my responsibility, and I will be a wife to you.'

'For God's sake, don't talk like that. I want you to be as you were, adorable, happy, free.'

She shook her head slowly from side to side.

Charles, offended, went out. She heard him go blundering down the stairs and out into the street.

She turned to her couch by the window and lay looking at the sun setting behind the roofs, chimneys, and towers of London. Amethyst and ruddy was the sky: smoked yellow and amber: blue and green, speckled with little dark clouds. She drank in its beauty, and lost herself in the dying day, aching at heart because there was nowhere in humanity a beauty of equal power in which she could lose herself, but everywhere barriers of egoism, intrigue, selfish calculation.... She thought of the little bookseller in the Charing Cross Road.... 'Doing good to others is doing good to yourself....' Ay, but make very sure that you are doing good and not well-intentioned harm.

She had meant to help Charles, had sacrificed herself to him, and look what had come of it! Deep within her heart she knew that she had been at fault, and that the mischief had been done when she had imposed her will on him.... As a child she had been brought up in the Catholic faith, and she had still some remnants of a religious conscience, and to this now she whispered that this was the sin against the Holy Ghost, for one person to impose his will on that of another.

XV

IN BLOOMSBURY

At the same time, in his attic, Rodd was pacing up and down his empty room, surveying the impotence to which he had reduced both his life and his work by his refusal to accept the social system of his time. His work was consciously subversive, and therefore unprofitable: his life was nothing. He was a solitary in London, as though he spoke a language which no one understood. So indeed he did. His words had meanings for him to which no one else had the smallest clue, for

they referred rather to his imagined world than to any actuality.

Hitherto that had troubled him not at all. Spinoza, Kant, Galileo had all talked a language unintelligible to their contemporaries, and with how many had Nietzsche been able to converse? The stories had it that there was one butcher and he was mad.

Groping with his imagination into the vitals of the society into which he had been born, Rodd had consoled himself with the assurance that a cataclysm would come to smash the odious system by which the old enslaved the young, and that then there would be a cleaner atmosphere in which his ideas could live, and his words would be intelligible to all, because in it that deeper consciousness which was released in his imagined world would come into play to sweep away all falsehoods and stale ideas.... But now the cataclysm had come within himself, and he was brought to doubt and self-examination. Had he not denied too much? Had he not carried abnegation too far? Had he not thwarted powers in himself which were essential even to his impersonal purpose? Was it paradoxically true that a man must be a person before he can be impersonal? His empty room, his books, his pile of manuscript! What a life! Had he after all been only a coward? Had he only shrunk into this silence to avoid the pain and boredom of reiteration?

At first his concern was all with the havoc wrought in his work from the moment when Clara swept into his imagination, but he was soon compelled to brush that aside and to grapple with the more serious fact that she had crept into his heart, which for the first time was active and demanding its share in his being. Then arose the horror that it was repelled by what it found in his imagination, cold, solitary, tortured souls, creatures who should be left to eke out their misery in private solitude, who had nothing to justify their exhibition to the world, who shamelessly reproached their fellows for the results of their own weakness, wretched clinging women, men hard as iron in their egoism.... His heart could not endure it, but until his heart had flooded his vision with its warmth he could not move, could come to no decision, except that he must leave the marvellous girl unmolested.

The furious will that had animated him through all his solitary years resented this intrusion, and was in revolt against the reason and the logic of his heart. That will in him had reduced the social system to its logical end, the destruction of the young by the old, and would allow his creative faculty no other material. It must have nothing but a bleak world of bitterness, and this it had imposed upon both his happy temperament and his generous heart, so that even in life he had been able to exercise nothing but a rather feeble kindness. His will had been to hold up to the world a picture of the end to which it must come, since splendour wrung from desolation must end in desolation.

And suddenly his will was defied by this amazing girl, all youth, all joy, revealing the eternal loveliness of the human spirit that endures though Empires fade away and societies come to chaos.

Very, very slowly, his will, which drew its force from the hypnotic influence of horror, was thrust back, and light crept into his imagined world, flowers blossomed in it, trees swayed in the wind, larks went soaring above green hills blazing with yellow gorse, birds hopped to their nests and sang, dogs barked and gambolled with delight—all his frozen memories slowly melted, and sweet and simple pleasures came to view to make a setting meet for Clara Day. And he remembered simple people with a steady kindness, people like the little bookseller who knew their world but believed in its redeeming goodness, people like a woman who had once nursed him through a terrible illness and had never ceased to pray for him, families where in his lonely youth in London he had been welcome—all these he remembered and grouped round Clara to make a better and a simpler world.

When his agony had run its course, and his old hypnotic will was broken, he told himself that he must be content that Clara should be the mistress of his imagination, since he had wrecked his own life and had nothing to offer her. Obviously she had found the world good. Nothing in her was theatrical, nothing baffled. He must reconcile himself to the acceptance of those two days with her as in themselves perfect, sufficient, and fruitful. Indeed, what need was there of more? They had met as profoundly as they could ever hope to meet. She would marry her lord, and gather about herself all the good and pleasant things of the earth, and he could return to his work and build it up anew.

With his rather absurd tendency to generalise from his personal experience he told himself that as youth and joy had been liberated from his imagined world, so also would they be in the world of actuality. His drooping hopes revived and a new ambition was kindled in him. He paced less rapidly to and fro in his empty room, slowed down day by day until he stopped, sat at his table and plunged once more into work. His arrogance reasserted itself, and he told himself—as was indeed the case—that he could extract more from a hint of experience than the ordinary man could from an overwhelming tragedy.

As he worked, he came more and more to regard his encounter with Clara as a holiday adventure. The Charing Cross Road was to him what Paris or the seaside was to the ordinary worker. The episode belonged to his holiday. It was nothing more, and must be treated as though it had happened to some other man: it must be smiled at, treasured for its fragrance, blessed for its fertility.... With the new weapon it had given him he would return to tobacco and paper, the materials of his existence.

He saw her name in the papers, her photograph here and there. Oh, well, she belonged to that world. No doubt she would amuse herself with theatrical success before she fell back upon the title and wealth which were laid at her feet.

However, convinced though he was of his renunciation, he could not stay away from the bookshop and went there almost every day in the hope of meeting her.

One evening as he returned home he met Verschoyle on the doorstep of his house, and could not refrain from speaking to him.

'Excuse me,' he said, 'I have seen you sometimes in the bookshop in Charing Cross Road.'

'Indeed?' replied Verschoyle, who was looking anxious and worried.

'Yes. I have seen you there with Miss Day.'

Verschoyle was alert and suspicious at once. He scanned this strange individual but was rather puzzled.

'Do you live here?' he asked.

'On the top floor,' replied Rodd, 'on the top floor—alone—I thought you might have been to see me.'

'No, no. I don't know you.'

'My name is Rodd.'

That conveyed nothing to Verschoyle.

'I had the pleasure of meeting Miss Day at the bookshop. I thought she might have mentioned it.'

'No.... I have been to see a Miss Messenger on the third floor. Do you know her?'

'Slightly.'

'You know nothing about her?'

'Nothing, except that she had a child that died.... I'm afraid I didn't even know her name. I don't bother myself much about my neighbours.'

'Thank you,' said Verschoyle. 'Good-night.'

Rodd let himself in, his curiosity working furiously at this strange combination of persons. What on earth could be the link between Verschoyle and the shabby, disreputable ménage on the third floor?... His heart answered ominously: 'Clara.'

He walked slowly up the dark, uncarpeted stairs, and, as he was at the bend below the third floor, he heard a shrill scream—a horrid scream, full of terror, loathing, contempt. He rushed up to the door of the third floor flat and found it open, stood for a moment, and heard a man's voice saying,—

'You shall, you sly cat. Give it me and you shall do as I tell you.'

'No, no, no!' screamed the woman. 'Mother!'

And another woman's voice, cruel, and harsh, said,—

'Do as he tells you, and don't be a fool!'

There was a scuffle, a fall, a man's heavy breathing, a gurgling sound of terror and suffocation. Rodd walked into the flat, and found the woman who waited for him on the stairs lying on the ground, clutching a bundle of bank-notes, while a little, mean-looking man was kneeling on her chest, half throttling her, and trying to force the notes out of her hand. The woman's mother was standing by shrieking aloud and crying,—

'Do as he tells you, you b—— fool! He knows what's what. He's got these blighters in a corner, and he'll make them pay.'

Rodd flung himself on the man, whom he recognised as the creature he and Clara had met on the stairs. He picked him up and threw him into a corner, where he lay, too terrified to move. The woman lay back moaning and rolling her eyes, almost foaming at the mouth. Her bosom heaved and she clutched the notes in her hand more tightly to her.... Rodd turned to the other two, and said,—

'Get out....'

They obeyed him, and he knelt by the woman and reassured her.

'Come now,' he said, 'out with the whole story before you've begun to lie to yourself about it.'

'It's my own money,' she gasped; 'I don't want to do any more. It's all fair and square, if he's paid. If a feller pays, it's all fair and square.'

Rodd accepted the soundness of this rudimentary ethic.

'He wanted half and half, but it's my own money. I signed a paper for it, and I'm not going back on my word. He wants me to. He wants me to go into the Imperium so that he can get on to some of the swells....'

The Imperium? Rodd determined that he would have the whole story out. He left her for a moment and locked the door. Then he lifted her into a chair—it was a flashy furniture-on-the-hire-system room—gave her a dose of brandy and began to ply her with questions,—

'Do you feel better?'

'Much better. I like being with you. You're so quiet. You'd understand a girl, you would. I've often wanted to come and tell you.... It fair knocked me silly when I saw you with her.'

'With whom?'

'Charley's girl.'

'Whose?'

'Charley's. Charley Mann's. He's my husband.'

Rodd was silent for some moments while he took this in.

'Who is this other—man?' asked Rodd kindly, beginning slowly to piece the story together.

'That's Claude.... He was a lodger of mother's before she went broke and had to come to live with me. He never let me alone. I wanted to go straight, I did really.... Charley's not bad, and I thought I should never see him again. I never thought he would make money. I never thought we should see him swanking it in the papers, or I'd never have had a word to say to Claude. I wouldn't really. Only Charley getting married to the other girl——'

It struck Rodd like a blow in the face. Kitty did not mark the effect of her story, and was not concerned with it. All she felt was relief in the telling.

'I wanted money to send mother out of England. I couldn't stand it any more. If it hadn't been for her there wouldn't have been Claude, and a girl at the theatre can have a good time on her own nowadays even with a kiddie. I've often wanted to tell you.'

'Does she know?'

'Charley's girl? Yes. She knows. It's a nice mix-up. Isn't it? And Charley's not bad. He'll just lose you same as he would his hat. No offence meant.'

She laughed hysterically.

'Who gave you the money?'

'A swell.'

'To keep your mouth shut?'

'Yes. Charley would have to go to prison. Claude's been in prison. That's why he'd like Charley to go. Everybody who's been to prison is like that. It makes them sly and hard.... But I say that Charley's paid: six hundred. I'd never have got that out of him if I'd stayed with him, would I?'

'I suppose not.... If there's any more trouble will you come to me?'

'I'd love to,' she said, perking up and casting at him the sorrowful languishing glances with which she had pursued him for so long. 'Claude says he's pushed her on so quick and he ought to have done the same for me.... Claude was at their wedding. I didn't know him then. He's a friend of mother's. We thought he had money but he hasn't got a bean.'

'I'll deal with Claude,' said Rodd. 'And if there is any more trouble, mind you come to me.'

'It was all after my baby died,' said Kitty, as if to excuse herself, but Rodd had accepted the story, and had no thought of excuse or forgiveness. His thought was all for Clara.

How comic it was that he should have given her Mann's book! Did she love Mann? She must have done. She could not have married him else.... But then what was Verschoyle to her, that he should have paid so large a sum in hush-money? A furious jealousy swept away what was left of Rodd's intellectual world and released at last his passions. His mind worked swiftly through the

story, picking it up in time with every thread.

Was she only an actress? Was the perfection which he had worshipped a figment, a projection of herself in the character most pleasing to his idealism? Impossible! There can be no feigning of purity, honesty, joy. That is where the pretences of humanity collapse. In such a pretence as that simulated passion—the ultimate baseness, breaks down, creates no illusion, and is foiled.

But on the face of it, what an appalling story! It brought him violently to earth. He could not move, but sat staring at the woman, wanting to tell her that she lied, but knowing that she had spoken according to the truth of the letter. Of the truth of the spirit she could most patently know nothing. Her world was composed of dull facts and smouldering emotions. She could know nothing of the world where emotions flamed into passion to burn the facts into golden emblems of truth. And that was Clara's world: the world in which for two days he had been privileged to dwell, a world in which soul could speak to soul and laugh at all the confusion of fact and detail in which they must otherwise be ensnared.... Mann, Verschoyle, a swift success in the theatre—the facts were of the kind that had induced the horror in which until he met her he had lived. His meeting with her had dispelled his horror, but the facts remained. He in his solitude might ignore them and dream on, but could she? Surely he owed it to her to offer her what through her he had won.... And then—to buy off the wretched woman, surely she could never have submitted to that!

He began to think of Charles Mann with a blistering, jealous hatred.

'I think I'd have killed myself,' said Kitty, 'if it had gone on. I don't wish them any harm now that he's paid up.... I wouldn't have said a word about it to any one, only she's so young. It did give me a bit of a shock, and Charles getting on, too. He's quite gray and has a bit of a stomach. I never thought he'd be the one to get fat. I'm all skin and bone. Look at my arms.'

Rodd left her. When he opened the door he was relieved to find that the unpleasant Claude had gone. Mrs Messenger was sitting by the fire in the front room, her skirts tucked up about her knees, and a glass of port on the mantelpiece. She turned her head with a leer and said,—

'Good luck! I always thought she was keen on you.... It's time she settled down. She was born to be respectable, and to look after a man. That's all most girls are fit for. But in the theatre a girl's got to look after number one or go down and out.'

The old woman with the painted face and dyed hair made Rodd's flesh creep. She seemed to him a symbol of all the evil in the world, decay, disruption, corruption, and with a flash of inspiration he discerned in her the source of all this pitiful tangle of lies. A tender sympathy entirely new to him took possession of his faculties and armed with this he determined that he would not fail in whatever part he was called upon to play in the drama of Clara's life.

He said to the old woman,—

'We have been talking it over. We have decided to book you a passage to Canada and to give you a hundred pounds with which to keep yourself alive until you find work to do.'

'What?' she said, 'me leave London? Dear old London, dear old Leicester Square and the theatres? And leave you to do what you like with my daughter, you dirty dog? I've seen her nosing round on the stairs after you, a feller that lives on bread-and-cheese and grape-nuts. I know your sort, you dirty, interfering blackguard. You've never given a girl as much as a drink in your life.'

'All the same,' said Rodd, 'your passage will be booked, and if Mr Claude What's-his-name shows his face here there'll be a neck broken on the stairs.'

He walked out and heard the old woman gulp down a glass of port and say,—

'Well, I'm damned!'

Then, as he moved upstairs to his own room he heard her screaming,—

'Kitty, you filthy little claw-hammer——'

The door was slammed to, and he heard only their voices in bitter argument, tears, reproaches, curses; but at last, as he paced to and fro in his lonely room, the tumult died down and he could wrestle with the new turbulent thoughts awakened in him.... Work was out of the question. He had been clawed back into life. If he did not want to be destroyed he must be profoundly, passionately, and scrupulously honest with himself. He must face his emotions as he had never done.

At first he thought of wildly heroic solutions. He would seize his opportunity with Kitty, take advantage of her soft gratitude and sweep her out of harm's way..... But what was the good of that? It settled nothing, solved nothing. To act without Clara's knowledge would be to betray her. That he was sure was what Verschoyle had done.

Already he had interfered and there was no knowing what Claude's spite might lead to.... O God, what a tangle! What should be done, what could be done, for Clara? No one mattered but

she. Mann, Verschoyle, himself, what did any of them matter? She was the unique, irreplaceable personality. Of that he was sure. It was through her glorious innocence that all these strange things had happened to her. A less generous, a more experienced and calculating woman would have known instinctively that there was some queer story behind Charles Mann.... She could leap into a man's heart through his mind. That was where she was so dangerous to herself. The history of his purely physical emotions would concern her not at all. Her own emotions in their purity could recognise no separation between body and spirit, nor in others could they suspect any division.... Of that he was sure. Without that the whole embroglio was fantastic and incredible. She could never in so short a time have achieved what she had done through calculation and intrigue. That kind of success took years of patience under checks, rebuffs, and insults.... Everywhere she offered her superb youth, and it was taken and used, used for purposes which she could not even suspect. Her youth would be taken, she would be given no room, no time in which to develop her talent or her personality.

The way of the world? It had been the way of the world too long, but the strong of heart and the worthy of soul had always resisted or ignored it.

Sometimes Rodd thought the only thing to do was to wait, to leave the situation to develop naturally. It would do Mann no great harm to get into trouble, but then—Clara would be marked. All her life she would have to fight against misunderstanding.... No, no. There could be no misunderstanding where she was concerned. Her personality answered everything. It would be fine, it would be splendid, to see her overriding all obstacles in her bounteous gift of the treasure that was in her to a world that in its worship of self-help and material power had forgotten youth, courage, and the supreme power of joy.

XVI

ARIEL

As the days went by and the production came nearer, the Imperium was charged with a busy excitement. The machinery was tightened up, and there was no sparing any of the persons concerned. Rehearsals began at ten in the morning, and dragged on through the day, sometimes not ending until eleven or twelve at night. Sir Henry had a thousand and one things to do, and was in something of a panic about his own words. He would stop in the middle of a lighting rehearsal to remember his part and would turn to a scene-shifter or a lime-light man, anybody who happened to be by, to ask if that was right, and when they stared at him he would lose his temper and say,—

'Shakespeare! It's Shakespeare! Everybody knows their Shakespeare.'

Clara took the precaution of learning his part in his scenes with her and was able to prompt him when he started fumbling or improvising. He was taut with anxiety, and completely ignored everything not immediately bearing on the production, as to which he was obviously not easy in his mind. He talked to himself a good deal, and Clara heard him more than once damning Charles under his breath. In spite of herself she was a little hurt that he took no notice of her outside her part in the play. His only concern with the world off the stage was through Lady Bracebridge and Lady Butcher, who were vastly busy with the dressing of the front of the house and began introducing their distinguished aristocratic and political friends at rehearsals, where they used to sit in the darkness of the auditorium and say,—

'Too sweet! Divine, divine!'

It was difficult to see what they could possibly make of the chaos on the stage, with actors strolling to and fro mumbling their parts, others going through their scenes, carpenters running hither and thither, the lights going up and down and changing from blue to amber, amber to blue, white, red.... Up to the very last Sir Henry made changes, and the more excited he got the further he drifted away from the play's dramatic context, and strove to break up the aesthetic impression of the whole with innumerable tricks, silences, gestures, exaggerated movements of the actors, touches of grotesque and irrelevant humour, devices by which Prospero could be in the centre of the stage, anything and everything to impose his own tradition and personality on both Shakespeare and Charles.

Clara was thankful that Charles had quarrelled with him and was not there to see. Sir Henry was like a man possessed. He worked in a frenzy to retrieve the situation, and to recover the ground he had lost; and he only seemed sure of himself in his scenes with Ariel, and over them he went again and again, not for a moment sparing Clara or thinking of the physical effort so much repetition entailed for her.

She did not object. It was a great relief to go to her rooms, worn out, and to lie, unable to think, incapable of calculation, lost to everything except her will to play Ariel with all the magic

and youthful vitality she possessed. Everything outside the play had disappeared for her, too. That so much of Charles's work should be submerged hurt her terribly and she blamed herself, but for that was only the more determined to retrieve the situation with her own art, to which, as Sir Henry revered it, he clung. She knew that and was determined not to fail. However much Charles's work was mutilated, her success—if she won it—would redeem his plight.

Therefore she surrendered herself absolutely to the whirling chaos of the rehearsals, from which it seemed impossible that order could ever come. She ordered her own thoughts by doing the obvious thing, reading the play until she was soaked with it. No one else apparently had done that and, as she grew more familiar with it and more intimate with its spirit, she began to doubt horribly whether Charles had done so either. His scenery seemed as remote from that spirit as Sir Henry's theatrical devices, and almost equally an imposition. As she realised this she was forced to see how completely she was now detached from Charles, and also, to her suffering, how she had laid herself open to the charge of having used him, though he, in his generous simplicity, would never see it in that light or bring any accusation against her.... She blamed herself far more for what she had done to Rodd. That, she knew, was serious, and the more intimate she became with Shakespeare's genius the more she understood the havoc she must have wrought in Rodd's life.

How strange was this world of Prime Ministers and actor-managers which dominated London and in which London acquiesced; very charming, very delightful, if only one could believe in it, or could accept that it was the best possible that London could throw up. But if it was so, what need was there of so much advertising, paragraphing, interviewing? Which was the pretence, the theatre or the world outside it? Which were the actresses, she and Julia Wainwright and the rest, or Lady Butcher and Lady Bracebridge? And in fine, was it all, like everything else, only a question of money? Verschoyle's money? And if Verschoyle paid, why was he shoved aside so ignominiously?

Clara shivered as she thought of the immense complication of what should be so simple and true and beautiful.... But what alternative was there? This elaboration and corruption of the theatre or the imagination working freely in an empty room.

She could see no other. Rodd's terrible concentration ending in impotence or the dissipation of real powers, as in Butcher and Mann, in fantasy.

Absorbed in her work, intent upon the forthcoming production, she was detached from them all and could at last discover how little any of them needed her. She could not really enter into their work though all three had been disturbed by her and diverted for a time at least from their habitual purposes.... What mattered in each of the three men was the artist, and in each the artist was fettered by life. She had promised them release only to plunge them into greater difficulties.

She brooded over herself, wondering what she was, and how she came to be so unconcerned with things that to other women seemed paramount. It was nothing to her that Charles had a wife. It had all happened long before he met her, and was no affair of hers.... That Sir Henry should make love to her was merely comic. She could not even take advantage of it, for in that direction she could not move at all. Instinctively she knew that her sex was given her for one purpose only, and that the highest, and she could not turn it to any base or material use. While she adhered to this she could be Ariel, pure spirit to dominate her life and direct her will, which no power on earth could break.... How came she to be so free, and so foreign to the world of women? Her upbringing! Her early independence! Or some new spirit stirring in humanity?

Already she had caught from Rodd his habit of generalising from his own experience, and in her heart she knew it, knew that she had begun what might prove to be her real life with him, but, caught up as she had been in Mann's schemes and dreams and visions, she would not accept this until all the threads were snapped. Being frank with herself, she knew that she desired and intended to snap them, but in her own time and with as little hurt as possible to those concerned.... Meanwhile it was wonderful, it was almost intoxicatingly comic to carry all the confused facts of her own life into the ordered world where she was Ariel and to imagine Mann, for instance, discoursing of birds and fishes to Trinculo and Stephano, or Rodd, with his passionate dreams of a sudden jet of loveliness in a desert of misery comparing notes with good Gonzalo, while she, both as Clara Day and as Ariel, danced among them and played freakish tricks upon them, and lured them on to believe that all kinds of marvels would come to pass and then bring them back to their senses to discover that she was after all only a woman, and that the marvels they looked for from her were really in themselves.

So she dallied with her power, not quite knowing what she wished to do with it, and, as she dallied, she became more conscious of her force, and she grew impatient with her youth which had been her undoing, so easily given, so greedily accepted. No one but Rodd had seen beyond it and, for a while, she detested him for having done so.... Nothing had gone smoothly since her meeting with him. The pace of events had quickened until it was too fast even for her, and she could do nothing but wait, nothing but fall back upon Ariel.

The dress rehearsal dragged through a whole day and most of a night. It hobbled along. Nothing was right. Sir Henry could hardly remember a word of his part. Ferdinand's wig was a monstrosity. Miranda looked like the fairy-queen in a provincial pantomime. There was hardly a dress to which Lady Butcher did not take exception, though she passed Clara's sky-blue and

silver net as 'terribly attractive.' ... Clara delighted in the freedom of her fairy costume. Her lovely slim figure showed to perfection. She moved like the wind, like a breeze in long silvery grass. She gave the impression of movement utterly free of her body, which melted into movement, and was lost in it. The stage-island was then to her really an island, the power of Prospero was true magic, the air was drenched with sea-salt, heavy, rich, pregnant with invisible life urging into form and issuing sometimes in strange music, mysterious voices prophesying in song, and plaints of woe from life that could find no other utterance.... Ah! How free she felt as all this power of fancy seized her and bore her aloft and laid her open to all the new spirit, all the promise of the new life that out of the world came thrilling into this magical universe. How free she felt and how oblivious of her surroundings! There was that in her that nothing could destroy, something more than youth, deeper than joy which is no more than the lark's song showering down through the golden air of April.... Here in her freedom she knew herself, a soul, a living soul, with loving laughter accepting the life ordained for it by Providence, but dominating it, shaping it, moulding it, filling it with love until it brimmed over and spilled its delight upon surrounding life to make it also free and fruitful.

Julia Wainwright caught her in the wings, and pressed her to her bosom, and exclaimed,—

'Oh, my dear, you will be famous—famous. They'll be on their knees to you in New York.'

And Freeland Moore, dressed for the part of Caliban, said,—

'This isn't going to be Sir Henry's or Mann's show. It is going to be Clara Day's.'

The good creatures! It was only a show to them, and they were elated and happy to think of the thousands and thousands of pounds, dollars, francs, roubles, and marks that would be showered on their friend. With such a success as they now dreamed the trouble they had dreaded for her would make no difference. A 'story' would be even valuable.

But what had Ariel to do with pounds and dollars, roubles and marks? Ariel asked nothing but freedom after ages pining in a cloven pine.... In this world of money and machinery and intrigue to control machinery with money, to be free was the deep and secret desire of all humanity. Here in London hearts ached and souls murmured to be free, only to be free, for one moment at whatever cost of tears and suffering and bloody agony. All this in her heart Clara knew, she knew it from her meeting with Rodd, from her solitary brooding in her room, from the drunken women fighting in the street, from the uncontrolled fantasy in Charles Mann, from the boredom that ate away poor Verschoyle's heart; and all the knowledge of her adventurous life she gathered up to distil it into the delight of freedom, for its own sake and also for the sake of the hereafter which, if there be no moment of freedom, no flowering of life, must sink into a deeper and more miserable slavery.

In this mood it was pathetic to see Sir Henry, whose whole power lay in machinery, pretending as Prospero to rule by magic. So pathetically out of place was he that he could not even remember the words that so mightily revealed his authority.... When he broke down, he would declare that it was quite a simple matter to improvise blank verse.... But Clara would not let him improvise. She was always ready with the words, the right inevitable words. She would not let him impair her freedom with his lazy reliance upon the machinery of the theatre to pull him through, and so, when he opened his mouth and looked vague, and covered the absence of words with a large gesture, she was ready for him.

He reproved her.

'I am always like this at a dress rehearsal. Dress rehearsals are always terrible. The production seems to go altogether to pieces, but it is always there on the night. A good dress rehearsal means a bad first night.'

But Clara refused to allow any of her scenes to go to pieces, and they were applauded by the Butcher-Bracebridge fashionables who sat in the stalls. Lady Butcher called out,—

'It will be one of the best things you have ever done,' and her son's voice was heard booming, 'Hear, hear! Good old pater.'

Verschoyle had dropped in, but he was captured by Lady Bracebridge and her daughter, and had to sit between them while they scandalised Clara. According to them she had run away from home and had led an unmentionable life in Paris, actually having been a member of a low company of French players; and she had married but had run away from her husband with Charles Mann, etc., etc.

'I beg your pardon,' said Verschoyle, 'but Miss Day is a friend of mine.'

'One admires her frankness so much,' said Lady Bracebridge. 'Adventures like that make an actress so interesting.'

'But this is her first appearance in any theatre.'

Lady Bracebridge looked incredulous. She put up her lorgnette and scanned Clara, who had just floated across the stage followed by Trinculo and Stephano.

'She is born to it.... I know what the French theatre is like. They are so sensible, don't expect anything else of their actresses.'

Verschoyle saw that it was useless to argue. Women will never relinquish their jealousy. He shifted uneasily in his seat: Lady Bracebridge was a great deal too clever for him and he saw himself being thrust against his will into marriage with her daughter, who had an affectation of cleverness and maddened him with remarks like,—

'That Ariel costume would make the sweetest dinner-frock. If I have one made, will you take me to Murray's?'

'Certainly not,' said Verschoyle.

Clara in her pure girlish voice had just sung 'Full fathom five thy father lies,' when Lady Bracebridge, in her most strident voice, which went ringing through the theatre, said,—

'I hear Charles Mann has a real wife who is *raging* with jealousy, simply raging. The most extraordinary story.'

Clara stopped dead, stood looking helplessly round, pulled herself together, and went on with the part. Verschoyle deliberately got up and walked out and round to the stage door, where already he found Lady Butcher in earnest converse with Sir Henry,—

'We can't have a scandal in the theatre, Henry. Everybody heard her....'

'The wicked old devil. Why didn't she keep her mouth shut?'

'She hates this girl you are all so crazy about.... Everybody heard her. You can't keep a thing like that quiet once it has been said publicly.'

'But she is wonderful, the most delicate Ariel. Mann isn't worrying us. I cleared him out.'

'Excuse me,' said Verschoyle, intervening. 'I can assure you there will be no trouble. I have seen to that. You have nothing to fear.'

'How sweet of you! Then I can tell everybody there is not a word of truth in it.'

Verschoyle turned his back on them, and went in search of Clara, whom he found trembling with fury on the stairs leading from her dressing-room to the stage.

'How dare you let that woman insult me publicly?' she cried. 'How dare you? How dare you? You ought to have killed her.'

Verschoyle stammered,—

'One can't kill people in the stalls of a London theatre.'

'She ought not to be allowed to live. Publicly! In the middle of the play! ... Either she or I will leave the theatre.'

'I'll see what I can do,' he mumbled, 'only for God's sake don't make it worse than it is.... Your only answer can be to ignore her. She'll be crawling to you in a few months, for you are marvellous.'

Clara saw that he was right. To match herself against the scandal-monger would be to step down to her level. To reassure her, Verschoyle told her how he had been to Bloomsbury to settle matters.

'Where?' she asked.

He described the square and the house, and at once she had a foreboding of disaster.

'Did you see any one else?'

'A queer fish I met at the door, with eyes that looked clean through me, and that little squirt Clott. He is at the bottom of it all.'

Clara gave a little moan.

'O-oh! Why does everybody hate Charles so? Everybody betrays him....'

'Oh, come,' said Verschoyle, 'he isn't exactly thoughtful for other people, is he?'

'That doesn't matter. Charles is Charles, and he must and shall succeed.'

'Not if it smashes you.'

'Even if it smashes me.'

He took her hands and implored her to be sensible.

'You lovely, lovely child,' he said, 'if Charles can't succeed off his own bat, surely, surely it means that there is something wrong with him. Why should you suffer? Why should you be exposed all your life to taunts and success and insults like that just now? It is all so unnecessary.... I'll go and see Charles. I'll tell him what has happened and that he may be given away at any moment now.'

'But why should they hate Charles?'

'It isn't Charles, darling. It is you they hate. You are too young, too beautiful. These women who have lied and intrigued all their lives can't forgive your frankness.'

'They can't forgive my being friends with you.... Oh! don't talk to me about it any more. I hate it all. So disgusting it is.'

'I want Charles to clear out. He can go to Paris and come back if this blows over.'

'I want him to be here to-morrow night. I want everybody to acknowledge that all this is his work. There's to be a supper to-morrow night after the performance. I want him to be there.'

Verschoyle shrugged his shoulders. He knew that opposition only made her more obstinate.

'Very well,' he said, and he returned to the stalls where he made himself exceedingly agreeable to Lady Bracebridge and her daughter, hoping to prevent any further outburst of jealousy. Lady Bracebridge was mollified and said presently,—

'After all, these things are nobody's affair but their own. I do think the scenery is perfectly delightful, though I can't say it is my idea of Caliban. But Henry is delightful. He reminds me so much of General Booth.'

Clara stood free of all this foolish world of scandal and jealousy. She had the answer to it all in herself. Whatever Clara Day had done, Ariel was free and unattainable. She could achieve utter forgetfulness of self, she could be born again in this miraculous experience for which she had striven. As Ariel she could lead these mortals a dance.

> 'So I charmed their ears,
> That, calf-like, they my lowing follow'd through
> Tooth'd briers, sharp furzes, pricking goss and thorns,
> Which enter'd their frail shins: at last I left them
> I' the filthy-mantled pool....'

The pool of scandal: drowned in their own foul words.

She plied her art, and even in the confusion of the dress rehearsal was the most delicate Ariel, so lithe, so lissom, that it seemed she must vanish into the air like the floating feathered seeds of full summer.... Abandoned to the sweet sea-breezes of the play she felt that the hard crust upon the world must surely break to let this spilling beauty pour into its heart. Surely, surely, she and Charles could have no enemies.

They meant nothing but what Charles had proposed at his absurd dinner—love: an airy magical love.... If only people would not interfere. She had proposed to herself to give Charles his triumph and then to settle his foolish mundane affairs. She knew she could do it, if only Verschoyle and these others would not complicate them still further. As for Charles being sent away to Paris, that was nonsense, sheer nonsense, that he should be ruined because he had a worthless woman who could, if she chose, use his name....

She was still being carried along by her set will to force London to acknowledge Charles as its king, and, being so near success, she was possessed by her own determination, and did not know to what an extent she had denied her own emotions, and how near she was to that obliteration of personal life which reduces an artist to a painted mummer. She was terribly tired after the dress rehearsal. Her head ached and her blood drummed behind her eyes. Sir Henry came to see her in her room, and kissed her hands, went on his knees, and paid his homage to her.

She said,—

'You owe everything to Charles Mann. He found me in a studio in Paris when I was very miserable and let me live in his art. I don't want you to quarrel with him. We've got to keep him safe, because there aren't many Charleses and I want you to ask him to supper to-morrow night.... I won't come if he doesn't.'

'I can feel success in the air,' said Sir Henry. 'It is like the old days. But suppose—er—something happened to him.'

Clara laughed, a thin, tired laugh. She was so weary of them harping on the silly story.

'I should go and tell them the truth, that I made him marry me and they'd let him go,' she said.

'It's such a waste of you,' said Sir Henry, sighing. 'You're not in love with him.'

She stared at him in astonishment.

'No,' she said, shocked into speaking the truth of her heart.

He crushed her in his arms, kissed her, gave a fat sigh, and staggered dramatically from the room. He had kissed her neck, her arms, her hands. She rushed to her basin and washed them clean.... Shaking with disgust and anger, she gazed at herself in her mirror, and was startled at the reflection. It was not Ariel that she saw, but Clara Day, a new Clara, a girl who stared in wonder at herself, gazed into her own eyes and through them, deep into her heart, and knew that she was in love. Her hand went to her throat to caress its whiteness. She shivered and shook herself free at last of all the obsessions that had crowded in her mind for so long, and she lost all knowledge of her surroundings and she could hear Rodd's beautiful deep voice saying,—

'Ay, that's it, to learn the tricks and keep decent. That's what one stands out for.'

XVII

SUCCESS

The Imperium was at its most brilliant for the first performance. Lady Butcher had done her work well, and the people crowded in the pit had a good show for their money even before the curtain rose. The orchestra hidden away beneath gay greenery discoursed light music as the great men and the lovely women of the hour entered in their fine array, conscious of being themselves, hoping to be recognised as such. Actors who had retired with titles had come to support Sir Henry by encouraging in the audience the habit of applause. Successful politicians entered the stalls as though they were walking out upon the platform at a great meeting. They stood for a moment and surveyed the assembly with a Gladstonian aquiline eye. Their wives blushed with pride in their property if their husbands were recognised and raised a buzz.... Lady Butcher, with her son, occupied one stage-box, and on the opposite side were Lady Bracebridge, her daughter, and, through a nice calculation on his part, Lord Verschoyle.... There were many Jews, some authors, a few painters, critics casting listless eyes upon these preliminary histrionics, women-journalists taking notes of the frocks worn by the eminent actresses and no less eminent wives of Cabinet Ministers ... a buzz of voices, a fluttering of fans, the twittering and hissing of whispered scandal, the cold venom that creeps in the veins of the society of the mummers.... There were magnificence and luxury, but beneath it all was the deadly stillness of which Charles had complained that night on St James's Bridge. Before the curtain rose, Clara could feel it.... Her dreams of a vast enthusiastic audience perished as soon as she set foot on the stage to make sure that Charles's scenery was properly set up.

He walked on to the stage at the same moment, looked round, shook out his mane and snorted.

'The lighting kills it,' he said.

Clara went to him.

'You see, Charles, it has come true.'

'Half-true. Half-true.'

'Do you feel anything wrong with the audience?'

'No. I have had a peep at it. All the swells are there, but none of the brains.'

Clara laughed at him.

'It's good-bye, Charles.'

'What do you mean?'

'It can never be the same again.... I'm not the same.'

'What do you mean?' he asked, in alarm.

'I'll tell you after the performance. Where are you sitting?'

'I'm in the Author's box.'

'With his ghost?'

'No. He has only turned in his grave.'

The stage-hands were pretty alert and busy for the shipwreck, which Charles had contrived very simply: a darkened stage, a mast with a lamp, which was to sway and founder, and low moving clouds.

Clara and he parted. The music ceased. The storm broke and the curtain rose.

After a few moments the novelty of the ship scene wore off, a certain section of the audience, perceiving how it was done laughed at the simplicity of it and another section cried 'Hush.' The play had to proceed to a divided house.

The bold sweep of Charles's design for the island-cell carried in spite of the lighting and was applauded, but, as usual with English actors, the pace was slow and the verse was ponderously spoken. Lady Bracebridge's sense of caricature was almost infallible. Sir Henry as Prospero did look exactly like General Booth and again a section of the audience laughed. They had come to laugh, as the English always do, at novelty, and they went on laughing until Miranda was put to sleep.

Clara, put to the challenge of this audience, summoned up every ounce of her vitality and did coldly and consciously what before she had done almost in an ecstacy. In the full light, before the huge audience she felt that the play was betrayed, that there are some things too holy to be made public.... She loathed that audience, tittering and giggling. Her entrance was almost a contemptuous command to bid them be silent, with her wild hair fiercely flying as she danced, every step taken lightly as though she were dropping from a friendly wind.

> 'All hail, great master! grave sir, hail! I come
> To answer thy best pleasure; be't to fly,
> To swim, to dive into the fire, to ride
> On the curl'd clouds, to thy strong bidding task
> Ariel and all his quality.'

She stood poised as she had stood on the crag in Westmorland. Even in her stillness there was the very ecstacy of movement, for nothing in her was still.... A great sigh of pleasure came from the audience, and, with a movement that was imperceptible and yet made itself felt, she turned into a thing of stone, and uttered in an unearthly voice her description of the storm.

'Damme!' said Prospero, under his breath. 'You've got them.'

She had, but she despised so easy a conquest. This audience was like a still pool. It trembled with pleasure as an impression was thrown into it like a stone. She could only move its stillness, not touch its heart. She despised what she was doing, but went through with it loyally because she was pledged to it.

Her first scene with Prospero was applauded with an astonished enthusiasm. Her youth, her simplicity, her grace, had given these metropolitans a new pleasure, a new sensation. It was no more than that. She knew it was no more. She was angry with the applause which interrupted the play. The insensibility of the audience had turned her into a spectacle. Her very quality had separated her from the rest of the performance, and in her heart she knew that she had failed. There was no play: there were only three personalities on exhibition—Sir Henry Butcher, Charles, and herself. Shakespeare, as Charles had said, had only turned in his grave. Shakespeare, who was the poet of these people, was ignored by them in favour of the personalities of the interpreters. There was no altering that. She had made so vivid an impression that the audience delighted in her and not in her contribution to the whole enchantment of the play. That was broken even for her, and as the evening wore on she ceased even to herself to be Ariel and was forced to be Clara Day, displayed in public.

She loathed it, and yet she had no sense of declension. No enchanted illusion had been established. Charles Mann's scenery remained only—scenery. Sir Henry Butcher and the rest of his company were only actors—acting. A troupe of performing animals would have been more entertaining: indeed, in her bitter disappointment, Clara felt that she was one of such a troupe, the lady in tights who holds the hoops through which the dogs and monkeys jump.... So powerful was this anger in her that after a while she began to burlesque herself, to exaggerate her movement, and to keep her voice down to a childish treble, and the audience adored her. They turned her into a show, a music-hall turn, at the expense of the magical poetry of Shakespeare's farewell to his art.... She could not too wildly caricature herself, and as she often did when she was angry she talked to herself in French:—'*Voila ce qu'il vous faut*! Ta-ra-ra-boom-de-ay!'—How they gulped down her songs! How they roared and bellowed when she danced—the delicious, wonderful girl!

She would not have done it had she known that Rodd was in front. He had decided to go at

the last moment, to see her, as he thought for the last time, before she was delivered up to the public.... He knew its voracity. He knew the use to which the theatre was put, to keep the public drugged, to keep it drowned beneath the leagues and leagues of the stale waters of boredom. He knew perfectly well that nothing could shift them out of it, that any awakening was too painful for them to endure, and that there was no means of avoiding this constant sacrifice of personality after personality, talent after talent, victim after victim. He had hoped against hope that Clara, being what she was, would save herself in time, but he had decided that he had no right to interfere, or to offer his assistance. Against a machine like the Imperium, what could youth do? He credited her with the boundless confidence of youth, but he knew that she would be broken.

He had a seat at the back of the dress circle, and he suffered agonies. Mann's scenery annoyed him. The fellow had dramatic imagination, but what was the good of expressing it in paint and a structure of canvas and wood without reference to the actors? For that was what Charles did. He left nothing to the play. His scenery in its way was as oppressive as the old realism; indeed it was the old realism standing on its head.... It called attention to itself and away from the drama.

Rodd caught his breath when Clara first appeared. He thought for a moment that she must succeed, and that the rest of the company, even the scenery, must be caught up into the beauty she exhaled. But the electricians were too much for her. They followed her with spot-limes and gave her no play of light and shadow.... That, Rodd knew, was Butcher, exploiting his new discovery, thrusting it down the public's greedy maw. The ruthlessness of it! This exquisite creature of innocence, this very Ariel, born at last in life to leap forth from the imagination that had created her, this delicious spirit of freedom, come to beckon the world on to an awakening from its sloth and shame! To be used to feed the appetite for sensation and novelty!

Rodd saw how she suffered, saw how as the entertainment proceeded the wings of her spirit shrivelled and left her with nothing but her talent and her will. Nothing in all his life had hurt him more.... And he, too, felt the deadly stillness of this audience, for all its excitement and uproarious enthusiasm. He was aware of something predatory and vulturine in it, the very hideous quality that in his own work he had portrayed so exactly that no one could endure it, and his own soul had sickened and grown weary until the day when he had met this child of freedom.... It was as though he saw her being done to death before his eyes, and this appalling experience took on a ghastly symbolical significance—richness and lewdness crushing out of existence their enemies youth and joy. Towards that this London was drifting. It had no other purpose.... Ay, this audience was Caliban, coveting Miranda, hating Ariel, lusting to murder Ferdinand—youth, enchantment, love, all were to be done to death. Clara's performance was to him like the last choking song of youth. It should have been, he knew she meant it to be, like all art, a prophecy.

What malign Fate had dogged her to trip her feet, so soon, to lead her by such strange ways to the success that kills, the success worshipped in London, the success won at the cost of every living quality.

He watched her very closely, and began to understand her contempt. Her touch of burlesque made him roar with laughter, so that he was scowled at by his neighbours in the dress circle, and he began to feel more hopeful. He felt certain that this was the beginning and the end for her, and he supposed that she would marry her Lord and retire into an easy, cultured life. He had liked Verschoyle on his one meeting with him, and knew that he was to be trusted.

Truly the words of the play were marvellously apt, when Clara sang,—

> 'Merrily, merrily shall I live now
> Under the blossom that hangs on the bough.'

Rodd looked down at Verschoyle leaning out of his box, and felt sure that this was to be her way out. More of this painted mummery she could not endure. She could mould a good, simple creature like Verschoyle to her ways and become a great personage. So comforted, he heard the closing scenes of the play in all its truthful dignity, and he looked round at the sated audience wondering how many of them attached any meaning to the words hurled at them with such amazing power.

> 'The charm dissolves apace,
> And as the morning steals upon the night,
> Melting the darkness, so their rising senses
> Begin to chase the ignorant fumes that mantle
> Their clearer reason.
>
> Their understanding
> Begins to swell, and the approaching tide
> Will shortly fill the reasonable shores,
> That now lie foul and muddy.'

The tenderness of this profound rebuke moved Rodd from his hatred of the audience, and on an impulse he ran down and stood waiting outside Verschoyle's box. He wanted to see him without precisely knowing why, perhaps, he thought, only to make sure that Clara was safe.

The applause as the curtain descended was tumultuous. Sir Henry bowed—to the right, to the left, to the centre. He made a little speech.

'I am deeply gratified at the great welcome you have given our efforts in the service of our poet. I am proud to have had the collaboration of Mr Charles Mann, and to have had the good fortune to discover in Miss Clara Day Ariel's very self. I thank you.'

The audience clamoured for Ariel, but she did not appear. She had moved away to her dressing-room, and had torn off her sky blue and silver net. She rent them into shreds, and her dresser, who had caught the elated excitement that was running through the theatre, burst into tears.

Rodd nearly swooned with anxiety when she did not appear, and he was almost knocked over when Verschoyle, white to the lips, darted out of the box.

'Sorry, sir,' he said, and was moving on when Rodd caught him by the arm.

'Let me go, damn you,' said Verschoyle.

'I want to speak to you.'

Verschoyle recognised his man and said,—

'In God's name has anything happened?'

(Something had happened but they did not know it. In her dressing-room, half way through the performance, she had found a note:—

'DEAR MADAM,—Either you grant me a profitable interview after the performance or the police will be informed to-morrow morning.

'CLAUDE CUMBERLAND.')

'I only wanted,' said Rodd, 'to ask you to convey my very best wishes to Miss Day. Just that. Nothing more.'

Verschoyle stared at him, and Rodd laughed.

'No. I am not what you think. I have been and am always at your service. To-night has been one of the most wretched of her life. I have been watching the performance. Butcher and his audience have been too much for them.'

'But the success was hers.'

'You do not know her well, if you imagine that such a success is what she desires.'

An attendant came up to them with a note from Clara enclosing Cumberland's. Verschoyle handed it to Rodd, who crumpled it up and said,—

'I knew that was the danger-point. Will you take me to see her? I know these people. I have done what I could. I kicked that fellow out just after you had gone.'

'There is a supper in Sir Henry's room,' said Verschoyle, with an uneasy glance at Rodd's shabby evening clothes. 'I will take you there. Are you an actor?'

'No. I write. I remember you at the Hall when I was at Pembroke.'

That reassured Verschoyle. He liked this deep, quiet man, and felt that he knew more than he allowed to appear, half-guessed indeed that he had played some great and secret part in Clara's life. He introduced him to Lady Bracebridge and her daughter, who had stayed to watch the huge audience melt away and to hold a little reception with congratulations on the success of 'their' play. Lady Bracebridge noticed Rodd's boots at once, an old pair of cracked patent leathers, but her daughter chattered to him,—

'Wasn't it all too sweet? I adore *The Tempest*. Caliban is such a dear, isn't he?'

Rodd smiled grimly but politely.

They made their way on to the stage where they found Charles Mann tipping the stage-hands. The stairs up from the stage were thronged with brilliant personages, all happy, excited, drinking in the atmosphere of success.... In Sir Henry's room Lady Butcher stood to receive her guests. 'Too delightful! ... The most charming production! ... Exquisite! ... Quite too awfully Ballet Russe!'

The players in their costumes, their eyes dilated with nervous excitement, their lips trembling with their hunger for praise, moved among the Jews, politicians, journalists, major and minor

celebrities.... Sir Henry moved from group to group. He was at his most brilliantly witty.

But there was no Ariel. Several ladies who desired to ask her to lunch in their anxiety to invest capital in the new star, clamoured to see her.

'She is tired, poor child,' said Sir Henry, with an amorously proprietary air.

'But she *must* come,' said Lady Butcher, eager to exploit the interest Clara had aroused, and she bustled away.

Charles Mann came in at that moment and he was at once surrounded with twittering women.

'You must tell him,' said Rodd to Verschoyle, 'he must get out.... Will you let her go with him?'

'Never,' said Verschoyle, and awaiting his chance, he plucked Charles by the sleeve, took him into a corner and gave him Cumberland's note.

Charles's face went a greeny gray.

'What does he mean?'

'Blackmail,' replied Verschoyle. 'You can't ask her to go on living with that hanging over her head.'

'I can pay,' said Charles.

'She'll pay on for ever.'

'What else can I do?'

'Clear out, give her a chance. Let her make her own life so that it can't touch her—whatever happens to you.'

'But I ...'

'Can you only think of yourself?'

'My work.'

'Look here, Mann. I've paid six hundred to keep this quiet. It hasn't done it. I suppose they've squabbled over the spoils.'

'Six hundred.'

'Yes. What can you do? These people ask more and more and more.'

'It's ruin.'

'Yes. If you don't clear out.'

Charles began to look elderly and flabby.

'All right,' he said. 'When?'

'To-morrow morning. I'll see that you have money and you'll get as much work as you like now—thanks to her.'

'You don't know what she's been to me, Verschoyle.'

'No. But I know what any other man would have been to her. You ought to have told her.'

'To-morrow morning,' said Charles. 'I'll go.'

He turned away and basked in the smiles and congratulations of the Bracebridge-Butcher set.

Verschoyle returned to Rodd,—

'That's all right,' he said. 'I was afraid that with this success he'd want to stick it out. These idealists are so infernally self-righteous.'

Lady Butcher returned with Clara, looking very pale and slender in a little black silk frock. Sir Henry came up to her at once and took possession of her. He whispered in her ear,—

'Did you get my flowers?'

'Yes.'

'And my note?'

'Yes.'

'Will you stay?'

'No.'

Her hand went to her heart as she saw Rodd. How came he here in this oppressive company? She was sorry and hated his being there.

She received her congratulations listlessly and accepted, without the smallest intention of acting upon her acceptance, all her invitations. Rodd was there. That was all she knew, he was there among those empty, voracious people.

He moved towards her and caught her as she was passed from one group to another.

'Forgive me,' he said. 'I had to come and see you. I thought it was for the last time.... I know all your story, even down to to-night. He is going away.'

'Charles?'

'Yes.'

'I can't stay here. I can't stand it.... You are not going to stay.'

'How do you know?'

'I was with you all through to-night....'

Their eyes met. Again there was nothing but they two. All pretence, all mummery had vanished. Life had become pure and strong, more rich and wonderful even than the play in which, baffled by the chances of life, she had striven to live.

'To-morrow,' she said, 'I am going to the bookshop at half-past twelve.'

He bowed and left her, and meeting Mr Clott or Cumberland on the stairs of his house he had the satisfaction of shaking him until his teeth rattled, and of telling him that Mr Charles Mann had gone abroad for an indefinite period.

XVIII

LOVE

The late September sun shone sweetly down upon Charing Cross Road, and its beams stole into the bookshop where the bookseller, in his shirt sleeves, sat wrestling with the accounts which he struggled to keep accurately. He hated them. Of all books the most detestable are account books. What has a man who trades in mind to do with money? Far better is it to have good books stolen than to keep them lying dusty on the shelf.

The bookseller chuckled to himself. The newspapers were full of praises of his 'young leddy,' though she could never be so wonderful and like a good fairy in the play-acting as she was when she walked into his shop bringing sweetness and light.... She had not been in for some time, and he had been a little worried about her. He was glad to know that it was only work that had kept her away. He had been half afraid that there might be 'something up' between her and that damned, silent Rodd, who had nothing in the world but a few bees in his bonnet. The bookseller, being a simple soul, wanted her to marry the Lord, to end the tale as all good heroines should, and he had even gone so far as to address imaginary parcels of books to her Ladyship.

Charing Cross Road was at its oddest and friendliest on this day when all London rang with Clara's fame, and the only place in which it found no echo was her own heart.

She had decided in her dressing-room half-way through the performance that she could never go near the Imperium again. That was finished. She had done what she had set out to do in the first instance. In her subsequent greater purpose she had failed, and she knew now why she had failed, because she was a woman and in love, and being a woman, she must work through a man's imagination before she could become a person fit to dwell on the earth with her fellows.... Without a pang she surrendered her ambitions, bowed to the inevitable, and for the first time for many a long week slept the easy, sweet sleep of youth. Her meeting with Rodd in the supper-room had relieved her of all her crushing responsibilities. She passed them on to him and from her he had won the strength to carry all things.

She was punctual to the minute, but he was late.

'They're falling over themselves about you in the papers, young leddy,' said the bookseller.

'Are they?'

'Haven't you seen them?'

He had cut out all the notices, and to please him she made a pretence of reading them, but they gave her a kind of nausea. The critics wrote like lackeys fawning upon Sir Henry's success.... In Paris with her grandfather she had once seen the *Mariage de Figaro* acted. Sir Henry reminded her of the Duc d'Almaviva, and she thought wittily that the type had taken refuge in the theatre, there perhaps to die. Sir Henry surely was the last of this line. Not even with the support of the newspapers would the world, bamboozled and cheated as always, consent any longer to support them.

It was a good transition this from the Imperium to the book-shop. Books were on the whole dependable. If they deceived you it was your own fault. There was not with them the pressure of the crowd to aid deception.

This wholesome little man living among books, upon them, and for them, was exactly the right person for her to see first upon this day when she was to discard her mimic for her real triumph. This day was like a flower that had grown up out of all her days. In its honey was distilled all the love she had inspired in others, and all the love that others had inspired in her.

This was the real London, here in Charing Cross Road, shabby, careless, unambitious, unmethodical. It was here in the real London that she wished to begin her real life. From the time of her first meeting with him in the book-shop, her deepest imagination had never left Rodd, and she knew all that he had been through. She had most profoundly been aware of his struggle to break free from his captivity, exactly as she had slowly and obstinately found her own way out. All that had been had vanished. Only the good was left. Evil had been burned away and for her now there was no stain upon the earth, no mist to obscure the sun. Her soul was as clear as this September day, and she knew that Rodd was as clear.... Of all that she had left she did not even think, so worthless was it. A career, money, power, influence? With love, the smile of a happy child, a sunbeam dancing into a dark room, a bunch of hedge-row flowers are treasures of more worth than all these, joys that give moments of perfection wherein all is revealed and nothing remains hidden.

Was there ever a more perfect moment than when Clara and Rodd met in the bookshop, each for the other having renounced all that had seemed of worth. Death might have come at that moment and both would have been satisfied, for richer, deeper, and simpler music there could not be.... She was amazed at the new mastery in him. The pained sensitiveness that had cramped him was all gone. He came direct to her, took possession of her without waiting for an impulse from her will. They met now in complete freedom and were frankly lovers.

The little bookseller in dismay looked from one to the other, but held his peace. Clara reminded him that he had once remarked how life consisted in men and women pulling each other through.

'That's so,' he said. 'Most of 'em trample on the rest.'

'Well,' said Clara. 'We've done it. We have pulled each other through.'

'Out of the burning,' said Rodd, with a laugh.

'Indeed! Are you going to join her in the play-acting?'

'Not at all,' said Clara. 'I'm going to join him in the play-writing. I have been a star for one night only.... If we starve, I shall make you take me on as your assistant. You could pay me a salary now.'

'I cannot see a man wi' a jowl like that letting his young leddy starve,' chuckled the bookseller.

They bought each other as presents the following books: *The Dramatic Works of J. M. Synge, The Love Letters of Abelard and Héloïse, The Marriage of Figaro, Tom Jones*, and six volumes of *The Works of Henrik Ibsen*, which were going cheap. These they ordered to be sent to her rooms, and with the bookseller's blessing—so hearty that it was well worth having—on their happiness they set out to reproduce in every detail the day of their first excursion.

They went by Tube to Highgate, and walked to Hampstead across the Heath, but when they came to the inn with the swing-boats and roundabouts they found them deserted, and were annoyed. They wanted the story told over and over again in exact replica, not varying by a simple detail. As that was impossible they had tea at the inn, and he told her the full and true story how he met her in the bookshop in the Charing Cross Road. She listened like a happy child, and she asked,—

'Did he love her?'

'As the earth the sun.'

But as they left the inn, history did repeat itself, for a girl turned and watched Clara enviously and said to her friend,—

'My! I wisht I had legs like that *and* silk stockings.'

So the day sped by, and in the evening they went down to the Imperium where it reared its brilliantly lit magnificence. The performance had begun. They read the placards outside the doors. Already there was a new poster with a flashy drawing of Ariel, in its vulgar way not unlike Clara. There were also posters reproducing the notices of the Ariel and the Prospero.

'And Ariel is gone,' said Rodd.

'I left a note for him last night,' said Clara. 'He'll probably sue me for breach of contract. He won't miss a chance of an advertisement.'

Rodd took her home, and they arranged that they would be married at once. Neither was quite sure whether the absurd marriage with Charles would make theirs illegal, but they decided to risk it.

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