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LOVE AND LUCY

BY

MAURICE HEWLETT

Author of "The Forest Lovers," "The Life and Death of Richard Yea and Nay," etc.



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LOVE AND LUCY

CHAPTER I

ONSLow SQUARE

This is a romantic tale. So romantic is it that I shall be forced to pry into the coy recesses of the mind in order to exhibit a connected, reasonable affair, not only of a man and his wife prosperously seated in the mean of things, *nel mezzo del cammin* in space as well as time—for the Macartneys belonged to the middle class, and were well on to the middle of life themselves—, but of stript, quivering and winged souls tiptoe within them, tiptoe for flight into diviner spaces than any seemly bodies can afford them. As you peruse you may find it difficult to believe that Macartney himself—James Adolphus, that remarkable solicitor—could have possessed a quivering, winged soul fit to be stript, and have hidden it so deep. But he did though, and the inference is that everybody does. As for the lady, that is not so hard of belief. It very seldom is—with women. They sit so much at windows, that pretty soon their eyes become windows themselves—out of which the soul looks darkling, but preening; out of which it sometimes launches itself into the deep, wooed thereto or not by *aubade* or *serena*. But a man, with his vanity haunting him, pulls the blinds down or shuts the shutters, to have it decently to himself, and his looking-glass; and you are not to know what storm is enacting deeply within. Finally, I wish once for all to protest against the fallacy that piracy, brigandage, pearl-fishery and marooning are confined to the wilder parts of the habitable globe. Never was a greater, if more amiable, delusion fostered (to serve his simplicity) by Lord Byron and others. Because a man wears trousers, shall there be no more cakes and ale? Because a woman subscribes to the London Institution, desires the suffrage, or presides at a Committee, does the *bocca baciata perde ventura*? Believe me, no. There are at least two persons in each of us, one at least of which can course the starry spaces and inhabit where the other could hardly breathe for ten minutes. Such is my own experience, and such was the experience of the Macartney pair—and now I have done with exordial matter.

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The Macartneys had a dinner-party on the twelfth of January. There were to be twelve people at it, in spite of the promised assistance of Lancelot at dessert, which Lucy comforted herself by

deciding would only make twelve and a half, not thirteen. She told that to her husband, who fixed more firmly his eyeglass, and grunted, "I'm not superstitious, myself." He may not have been, but certainly, Lucy told herself, he wasn't very good at little jokes. Lancelot, on the other hand, was very good at them. "Twelve and a half!" he said, lifting one eyebrow, just like his father. "Why, I'm twelve and a half myself!" Then he propounded his little joke. "I say, Mamma, on the twelve and halfth of January—because the evening is exactly half the day—twelve and a half people have a dinner-party, and one of them *is* twelve and a half. Isn't that neat?"

Lucy encouraged her beloved. "It's very neat indeed," she said, and her grey eyes glowed, or seemed to glow.

"It's what we call an omen at school," said Lancelot. "It means—oh, well, it means lots of things, like you're bound to have it, and it's bound to be a frightful success, or an utter failure, or something of that kind." He thought about it. Developments crowded upon him. "I say, Mamma—" all this was at breakfast, Macartney shrouding himself in the *Morning Post*. [Pg 4]

"Yes, Lancelot?"

"It would be awfully good, awfully ingenious and all that, if one of the people was *twice* twelve and a half."

She agreed. "Yes, I should like that. Very likely one of them is."

Lancelot looked extremely serious. "Not Mr. Urquhart?" he said.

"No," said Lucy, "I am sure Mr. Urquhart is older than that. But there's Margery Dacre. She might do."

Lancelot had his own ideas as to whether women counted or not, in omens, but was too polite to express them.

"Is she twenty-five, do you think? She's rather thin." Lucy exploded, and had to kiss the unconscious humourist. "Do you think we grow fatter as we grow older? Then you must think me immense, because I'm much more than twenty-five," she said.

Here was a vital matter. It is impossible to do justice to Lancelot's seriousness, on the edge of truth. "How much more are you, really?" he asked her, trembling for the answer. [Pg 5]

She looked heavenly pretty, with her drawn-back head and merry eyes. She was a dark-haired woman with a tender smile; but her eyes were her strong feature—of an intensely blue-grey iris, ringed with black. Poising to tantalise him, adoring the fun of it, suddenly she melted, leaned until her cheek touched his, and whispered the dreadful truth—"Thirty-one."

I wish I could do justice to his struggle, politeness tussling with pity for a fall, but tripping it up, and rising to the proper lightness of touch. "Are you really thirty-one? Oh, well, that's nothing." It was gallantly done. She kissed him again, and Lancelot changed the subject.

"There's Mr. Lingen, isn't there?" he asked, adding, "He's always here."

"Much more than twenty-five," said his mother, very much aware of Mr. Lingen's many appearances in Onslow Square. She made one more attempt at her husband, wishing, as she always did wish, to draw him into the company. It was not too successful. "Lingen? Oh, a stripling," he said lightly and rustled the *Morning Post* like an aspen tree. [Pg 6]

"Father always talks as if he was a hundred himself," said Lancelot, who was not afraid of him. He had to be content with Miss Dacre after all. The others—the Judge and Lady Bliss, Aunt Mabel and Uncle Corbet, the Worthingtons, were out of the question. As for Miss Bacchus—oh, Miss Bacchus was, *at least*, five hundred, said Lancelot, and wished to add up all the ages to see if they came to a multiple of twelve and a half.

Meanwhile Mr. Macartney in his leisurely way had risen from the table, cigar in mouth, had smoothed his hair before the glass on the chimney-piece, looked at his boots, wriggled his toes in them with gratifying results, adjusted his coat-collar, collected his letters in a heap, and left the room. They saw no more of him. Half an hour later the front door shut upon him. He had gone to his office, or, as he always said, Chambers.

He was rather bleak, and knew it, reckoning it among his social assets. Reduced into a sentence, it may be said of Macartney that the Chief Good in his philosophy was to be, and to seem, successful without effort. What effort he may have made to conceal occasional strenuous effort is neither here nor there. The point is that, at forty-two, he found himself solidly and really successful. The husband of a very pretty wife, the father of a delightful and healthy son, the best-dressed solicitor in London, and therefore, you may fairly say, in the world, with an earned income of some three or four thousand a year, with money in the funds, two houses, and all the rest of it, a member of three very old-fashioned, most uncomfortable and absurdly exclusive clubs—if this is not success, what is? And all got smoothly, without a crease of the forehead, by means of an eyeglass, a cold manner and an impassivity which nothing foreign or domestic had ever disturbed. He had ability too, and great industry, but it was characteristic of him to reckon these as nothing in the scales against the eyeglass and the manner. They were his by the grace of God; but the others, he felt, were his own additions, and of the best. These sort of investments enabled a man to sleep; they assured one of completeness of effect. Nevertheless he was a much more acute and vigorous-minded man than he chose to appear. [Pg 7]

He was a solicitor, it is true, and had once been called an attorney by a client in a rage; but he could afford to smile at that because he was quite a peculiar sort of solicitor, by no means everybody's money. Rather, he was a luxury, an appanage of the great. His office, which he called "Chambers," as if it was an old house in the country, was in Cork Street; his clients were landed gentry, bankers, peers and sons of peers. The superior clergy, too: he handled the affairs of a Bishop of Lukesboro', and those of no less than three Deans and Chapters. Tall, dark and trenchant, with a strong nose and chin, and clouded grey eyes, a handsome man with a fine air of arrogant comfort on him, he stood well, and you could not but see what good clothes he wore—to my taste, I confess, a little too good. His legs were a feature, and great play was made by wits with his trousers. He was said to have two hundred pairs, and to be aiming at three hundred and sixty-five. Certainly they had an edge, and must have been kept in order like razors; but the legend that they were stropped after every day's use is absurd. They used to say that they would cut paper easily, and every kind of cheese except Parmesan.

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He wore an eyeglass, which, with the wry smile made necessary by its use, had the marked effect of intimidating his clients and driving them into indiscretions, admissions and intemperate discourse. Hypnotised by the unknown terrific of which the glitter of the blank surface, the writhen and antick smile were such formidable symbols, they thought that he knew all, and provided that he should by telling it him. To these engines of mastery he had added a third. He practised laconics, and carried them to the very breaking point. He had in his time—I repeat the tale—gone without his breakfast for three days running rather than say that he preferred his egg poached. His wife had been preoccupied at the time—it had been just before Lancelot was born, barely a year after marriage—and had not noticed that he left cup and platter untouched. She was very penitent afterwards, as he had intended she should be. The egg was poached—and even so she was afraid to ask him when the time was ripe to boil it again. It made her miserable; but he never spoke of it. Of course all that was old history. She was hardened by this time, but still dreadfully conscious of his comforts, or possible discomforts.

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This was the manner of the man who, you may say, had quizzed, or mesmerised, Lucy Meade into marriage. She had been scarcely eighteen; I believe that she was just seventeen and a half when he presented himself, the second of three pretty, dark-haired and grey-eyed girls, the slimmest and, as I think, by far the prettiest. The Meades lived at Drem House, which is practically within Bushey Park. Here the girls saw much society, for the old Meades were hospitable, and the Mother Meade, a Scotchwoman, had a great idea of establishing her daughters. The sons she left to Father Meade and his competent money-bags. Here then James Adolphus Macartney presented himself, and here sat smiling bleakly, glaring through his glass, one eyebrow raised to enclose it safely—and waited for her to give herself away. Swaying beneath that shining disk, she did it infallibly; and he heard her out at leisure, and accepted her.

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That's poetry of course. Really, it came near to that. He had said to her at a garden-party, in his easiest, airiest manner, "You can't help knowing that I am in love with you. Now, don't you think that we should be a happy couple? I do. What do you say, Lucy? Shall we have a shot?" He had taken her hand—they were alone under a cedar tree—and she had not known how to take it away. She was then kissed, and had lost any opportunity there might have been. That was what really happened, and as she told her sister Mabel some time afterwards, when the engagement had been made public and there could be no question of going back, "You know, Mabel, he seemed to expect it, and I couldn't help feeling at the time that he was justified." Mabel, tossing her head up, had protested, "Oh, my dear, nobody knows whether he was justified but yourself;" and Lucy, "No, of course not." "The question," Mabel went on, "is whether you encouraged him or not." Lucy was clear about that: "No, not the least in the world. He—encouraged himself. I felt that I simply had to do something."

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I suspect that that is perfectly true. I am sure that he did just as I said he always did, and bluffed her into marriage with an eyeglass and smile awry. Whether or no he bluffed himself into it too, tempted by the power of his magic apparatus, is precisely the matter which I am to determine. It may have been so—but anyhow the facts show you how successful he was in doing what had to be done. *Cosa fatta capo ha*, as the proverb says. The thing done, whether wisely or not, was smoothly done. Everything was of a piece with that. He pulled off whatever he tried for, without any apparent effort. People used to say that he was like a river, smoothly flowing, very deep, rippling, constant in mutability, husbanding and guiding his eddies. It's not a bad figure of him. He liked it himself, and smiled more askew and peered more blandly when he heard it.

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Small things betray men. Here is one. His signature was invariably in full: "Yours very truly, James Adolphus Macartney." It was as if he knew that Adolphus was rather comic opera, but wouldn't stoop to disguise it. Why bother? He crowded it upon the Bishop, upon the Dean and Chapter of Mells, upon old Lord Drake. He said, "Why conceal the fact that my sponsors made a *faux pas*? There it is, and have done with it. Such things have only to be faced to be seen as nothings. What! are we reasonable beings?"

Now when Lucy Meade, practically a child for all her sedateness and serious eyes, married him, two things terrified her on the day. One was her husband and the other lest her friends should discover it. They never did, and in time her panic wore off. She fought it in the watches of the night and in the glare of her lonely days. Not a soul, not her mother, not even Mabel, knew her secret. James never became comic to her; she never saw him a figure of fun; but she was able to treat him as a human being. Lancelot's arrival made all the difference in the world to that matter as to all her other matters, for even Lucy herself could not help seeing how absurdly jealous James was of his offspring. For a time he was thrown clean out of the saddle and as near falling

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in his own esteem as ever in life. But he recovered his balance, and though he never regained his old ascendancy, which had been that of a Ju-ju, he was able to feel himself, as he said, "Master in his own house," with a very real reserve of terrorism—if it should be wanted. The great thing, Macartney thought, was discipline, constant, watchful discipline. A man must bend everything to that. Women have to learn the virtue of giving up, as well as of giving. Giving is easy; any woman knows that; but giving up. Let that be seen as a subtle, a sublimated form of giving, and the lesson is learned. But practice makes perfect. You must never relax the rein. He never did. There was all the ingenuity and patience of a woman about him.

By this time, after twelve years and more of marriage, they were very good friends; or, why not say, old acquaintances? There are two kinds of crystallisation in love affairs, with all respect to M. de Stendhal. One kind hardens the surfaces without any decorative effect. There are no facets visible, no angles to catch the light. In the case of the Macartney marriage I suspect this to have been the only kind—a kind of callosity, protective and numbing. The less they were thrown together, she found, the better friends they were. At home they were really no more than neighbours; abroad she was Mrs. Macartney, and never would dine out without him. She was old-fashioned; her friends called her a prude. But she was not at all unhappy. She liked to think of Lancelot, she said, and to be quiet. And really, as Miss Bacchus (a terrible old woman) once said, Lucy was so little of a married woman that she was perfectly innocent.

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But she was one-and-thirty, and as sweet and pretty a woman as you would wish to see. She had the tender, dragging smile of a Luini Madonna; grave, twilight eyes, full of compassionate understanding; very dark eyebrows, very long lashes, like the fringe of rain over a moorland landscape. She had a virginal shape, and liked her clothes to cling about her knees. Long fingers, longish, thin feet. But her humorous sense was acute and very delightful, and all children loved her. Such charms as these must have been as obvious to herself as they were to everybody else. She had a modest little court of her own. Francis Lingen was almost admittedly in love with her; one of Macartney's friends. But she accepted her riches soberly, and did not fret that they must be so hoarded. If, by moments, as she saw herself, or looked at herself, in the glass, a grain of bitterness surged up in her throat, that all this fair seeming could not be put out to usury—! well, she put it to herself very differently, not at all in words, but in narrowed scrutinising eyes, half-turns of the pretty head, a sigh and lips pressed together. There had been—nay, there was—Lancelot, her darling. That was usufruct; but usury was a different thing. There had never been what you would call, or Miss Bacchus would certainly call, usury. That, indeed! She would raise her fine brows, compress her lips, and turn to her bed, then put out the light. Lying awake very often, she might hear James chain the front door, trumpet through his nose on the mat, and slowly mount the stairs to his own room. She thought resolutely of Lancelot pursuing his panting quests at school, or of her garden in mid-June, or of the gorse afire on Wycross Common,—and so to sleep.

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A long chapter, but you will know the Macartney pair by means of it.

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CHAPTER II

A DINNER PARTY

This was not to be one of Macartney's grand full-dress dinner-parties, the sort where you might have two lords, and would be sure to have one with his lady; or a Cabinet Minister in a morning-coat and greenish tie; or a squire and squires from Northumberland up for a month of the season; or the Dean of Mells. No, nor was it to be one which Lucy had to give to her visiting-list, and at which, as Macartney rarely failed to remark, there was bound to be a clergyman, and some lean woman with straw-coloured hair interested in a Settlement. It was to be a particular kind of dinner-party, this one, of which the first object was to bring Urquhart in touch with Lingen. It could have been done at a club, no doubt. Macartney admitted it. "Yes, I know, I know,"—he used his most tired voice, as if he had been combating the suggestion all along. "You are perfectly right. It might—if it had not happened to be exactly what I didn't want. Jimmy Urquhart is rather a queer fish. He is apt to shy off if one is not careful. It don't suit me to bring them together explicitly, do you see? I want them to happen on each other. They can do that better here than anywhere. Do you see?"

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Lucy saw, or saw enough. She never enquired into James's law affairs. "Shall I like Mr. Urquhart, do you think?" she asked him.

The eyeglass focussed upon the cornice, and glared at a fly which found itself belated there. "Oh, I think so. Why not?"

"Well, you see, I don't know why not—or why I should. Have I ever seen him?"

James was bored. "No doubt you have. He's very much about."

"Yes," said Lucy, "but I am not."

James left the fly, and fixed her—apparently with horror. Then he looked at his boots and moved his toes up and down. "He looks like a naval officer," he said; "you instinctively seek the cuffs of his coat. Beef-coloured face, blue eyes, a square-jawed chap. Yes, you might like him. He might

amuse you. He's a great liar." Lucy thought that she might like Mr. Urquhart.

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On those lines the party was arranged: the Blisses because "we owe them a dinner; and I think the Judge will be amused by Jimmy;" the Worthingtons—make-weights; but "She's a soft pink woman, like a Persian kitten."

"Does Mr. Urquhart like that?" Lucy asked, but James, who didn't like his jokes to be capped, said drily, "I don't know."

Then Lucy's favourite sister Mabel was to be allowed because James rather liked Corbet. He thought him good style. Now we wanted two women. One must be Miss Bacchus—"hideous, of course," said James; "a kind of crime, but very smart." He meant that she mixed with the aristocracy, which was true, though nobody knew why. The last was to be Margery Dacre, a very pretty girl. Lucy put her forward, and James thought her over, gazing out of window. "I like her name," he said—so Lucy knew that she was admitted.

That was all. The rest was her care, and he washed his mind of it, very sure that she would see to it. He wished the two men to meet for a particular reason in a haphazard way, because it was better to drift Urquhart into a thing than to lead him up to it. Moreover, it was not at all disagreeable to him that Urquhart, a club and office acquaintance, should see how comfortably placed he was, how well appointed with wife and child, with manservant and maidservant and everything that was his. Urquhart was a rich man, and to know that his lawyer was rich was no bad thing. It inspired confidence. Now the particular thing to be done with the two men, Francis Lingen and Urquhart, was this. Francis Lingen, who might be a baronet some day and well to do, was at the moment, as at most moments hitherto, very short of money. Urquhart always had plenty. Macartney's idea was that he might get Urquhart to fill Francis Lingen's pockets, on terms which could easily be arranged. There was ample security, of course. Francis Lingen could have gone to the Jews, or the bank, but if the thing could be done in a gentlemanly way through one's lawyer, who also happened to be a gentleman, in one's own set, and so on—well, why not?

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Hence the little dinner, over whose setting forth Lucy puckered her brows with Mrs. Jenkins, her admirable cook, and wrote many notes on little slips of paper which she kept for the purpose. She knew quite well when James was "particular" about a party. He said less than usual when he was "particular." Over this one he said practically nothing. So she toiled, and made a success of it.

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The drawing-room looked charming, and she herself in black over white, with her pearls, the most charming thing in it. It wanted a week of Lancelot's day for school; he was to come in to dessert—that was understood. But the possible danger of a thirteenth was removed by their being two tables of six each. James had suddenly ordered this variation of practice—he did not say why—and so it was to be. Crewdson, the invaluable butler-valet of the house, who presided over a zenana of maids, and seemed to carry his whiskers into the fray like an oriflamme, was visibly perturbed at this new notion. "Mr. Macartney has his reason, we know. But how is one gentleman's servant to split himself in halves? And where does he stand, Mrs. Jenkins? With tables dotted about—like a café—or an archumpelygo?" He knew that it was done in the highest places, but he knew his own place best. "We are not what you call the smart set," he said. "We are not Park Lane or Brook Street. But we are solid—the professions—the land and the church. No jinks in this house. And small tables is jinks. Not a dinner, but a kick-up." So Crewdson thought, and so he looked, but his master was flint.

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Mabel came the first, the lively and successful Mabel, two years younger than Lucy—she and Laurence: he was Laurence Corbet, Esq., of Peltry Park, Wavertree, and Roehampton, S.W., a hunting man and retired soldier, as neatly groomed as a man may be. He was jolly, and adored his Mabel. He was county, and approved by James. Lucy used to say of him that his smile could cure a toothache. Lancelot pounced upon the pair instantly and retired with them to the conservatory to show off his orange-tree, whose pip had been plunged on his first birthday. But before long a suspicious sliding of the feet and a shout from Corbet of "Goal!" betrayed the orange-tree's eclipse.

Next plunged Miss Bacchus, with her front hair and front teeth, and air of digging you in the ribs. She explained that she made a point of being early lest she should be taken for an actress, and forestalled Macartney's assurance that she never would be—which annoyed him. The Worthingtons—she like an autumn flower-bed, and he pale and sleek—and Francis Lingen came in together: Lingen, a very elegant, pale pink and frail young man with a straw-coloured moustache, who bowed when he shook your hand as if he was going to kiss it but remembered just in time that he was in England. He lowered his voice when he spoke to women, and most of them liked it. Lucy wasn't sure whether she did or not. It made her self-conscious and perverse at once. She found herself wondering (a) whether he was going to make love to her, (b) when he was going to begin, and (c) how she might best cut him out. All this was bewildering, made her feel stupid, and annoyed her. But she really liked Francis Lingen, and had been amused to discover how much he was "Francis" in her private mind. Certainly he was very elegant. He had an outside pocket to his dress coat, and a handkerchief which you could have plugged your tooth with.

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He had just said to Lucy, "I'm so glad to see you. It's more than a week since we met—and I want your advice—" when Crewdson, like a priest, announced Sir Matthew and Lady Bliss. The Judge and his dame were before Lucy—the lady had a motherly soul in crimson satin and paste, the gentleman square and solid, like a pillar-box with a bald head. That is a pretty exact description of him. The Judge was very square-headed, very shiny and very plain; but he was solid, and he

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was useful. Macartney used to say that he had a face like a bad egg. Certainly he was curdled—but he shone and looked healthy.

Lucy allowed herself to be mothered, and in the meantime murmured the Judge's name and Miss Bacchus's.

"Everybody knows Miss Bacchus," said the gallant man, and Miss Bacchus briskly rejoined, "More people know Tom Fool—" After that they got on excellently. Then she heard from the door, "Mr. Urquhart" and had time to turn Francis Lingen over to Lady Bliss before she faced the ruddy and blue-eyed stranger. Her first thought, the only one she had time for, was "What very blue eyes, what a very white shirt-front!" when she shook hands.

"How d'ye do? You won't know who I am," he said at once.

"Oh, but I do," she assured him. "James described you to me."

He blinked. "Oh, did he? I suppose he told you I was a great liar?"

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James's very words. She nodded without speaking, but laughter flickered over her face like summer lightning.

"Well," said Urquhart, "I am—to him. I've known Macartney for years—long before you did. I like him, but I think he gives himself airs. Now you can't, you know, when the man with you is a liar. You never know where to have a liar, or whether you have him or not. And then you get in a fright whether he's not having you. Macartney, saving your presence, doesn't like being had."

Lucy laughed, and turned to wave her hand to Lancelot in the entry of the conservatory.

"That your boy?" Urquhart asked. "But of course. He's like you—with his father's tricks." That was perfectly true. "And that's your sister, of course. Pretty woman. Like you too—you in a sunset." Perfect unconsciousness robbed this open commentary of sting.

Upon him drifted Mrs. Worthington, like a peony in the tideway. Urquhart bowed. "Your servant, ma'am."

She cried, "Hullo, Jimmy, you here?"

"Where else?"

"Why, I thought you were in Switzerland."

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"So I was," he said. "All among the curates. But I came back—because they didn't." He turned to Lucy. "And because I was asked here."

She asked him, "Were you ski-ing? Lancelot will grudge you that."

He told her, "I was not. No lonely death for me. I was bobbing it. You are swept off by dozens at a time there—by fifties in a cave. It's more cheerful." Then he seemed to remark something which he thought she ought to know. "Jimmy. You heard her? Now Macartney and I are both called James. But who ever made a Jimmy of him?" She was annoyed with him—the man seemed to suppose she could be pleased by crabbing James—and glad of Margery Dacre, a mermaid in sea-green, who swam in with apologies—due to Macartney's abhorrent eyeglass upon her. And then they all went in to their archumpelygo, where Crewdson and his ladies were waiting for them, *rari nautes*.

Lucy's table—she was between the Judge and Urquhart and had Mabel, Worthington and Miss Bacchus before her—at once took the mastery. Urquhart fixed Crewdson with his eye and thenceforward commanded him. James's eyeglass, speechless with horror over Lady Bliss's shoulder, glared like a frosty moon.

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Miss Bacchus, it seems, was his old acquaintance. She too called him Jimmy, and drove at him with vigour. He charged her not to rally him, and being between the two sisters, talked to both of them at once, or rather started them off, as a music-hall singer starts the gallery, and then let them go on over his head.

They talked of Wycross, Lucy's house in the country, compared it with Peltry, which Mabel deprecated as a barrack, and came to hear of Urquhart's house in the New Forest. It was called Martley Thicket. Urquhart said it was a good sort of place. "I've made an immense lake," he said, with his eyes so very wide that Miss Bacchus said, "You're making two, now." He described Martley and the immense lake. "House stands high in beech woods, but is cut out to the south. It heads a valley—lawns on three sides, smooth as billiard tables—then the lake with a marble lip—and steps—broad and low steps, in flights of eight. Very good, you know. You shall see it."

Lucy wanted to know, "How big was the lake, really."

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Urquhart said, "It looked a mile—but that's the art of the thing. Really, it's two hundred and fifty yards. Much better than a jab in the eye with a blunt stick. I did it by drainage, and a dam. Took a year to get the water up. When a hunted stag took to it and swam across, I felt that I'd done something. Fishing? I should think so. And a bathing-house in a wooded corner—in a cane-brake of bamboos. You'll like it."

Miss Bacchus said, "I don't believe a word of it;" but he seemed not to hear her.

"When will you come and see it?" he asked Lucy.

She agreed that see it she must, if only to settle whether it existed or not. "You see that Miss Bacchus has no doubts."

Urquhart said, "She never has—about anything. She is fixed in certainty like a bee in amber. A dull life."

"Bless you, Jimmy," she said, "I thrive on it—and you'll never thrive."

"Pooh!" said Urquhart, "what you call thriving I call degradation. What! you snuggle in there out of the draughts—and then somebody comes along and rubs you, and picks up bits of paper with you." His good spirits made the thing go—and James's eyeglass prevailed not against it.

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But Urquhart's real triumph was at dessert—Lancelot sedately by his mother; between her and the Judge, who briskly made way for him. Lancelot in his Eton jacket took on an air of precocious, meditative wisdom infinitely diverting to a man who reflects upon boys—and, no doubt, infinitely provocative.

His coming broke up the talk and made one of those momentous pauses which are sometimes paralysing to a table. This one was so, and even threatened the neighbouring island. Upon it broke the voice of Urquhart talking to Mabel Corbet.

"I was out in Corfù in 1906," he was heard to say; "I was in fact in the bath, when one of my wives came to the door, and said that there was a Turk in the almond-tree. I got a duck-gun which I had and went out—" Lancelot's eyes, fixed and pulsing, interdicted him. They held up the monologue. In his hand was a robust apple; but that was forgotten.

"I say," he said, "have you got two wives?"

Urquhart's eyes met his with an extenuating look. "It was some time ago, you see," he said; and then, passing it off, "There are as many as you like out there. Dozens."

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Lancelot absorbed this explanation through the eyes. You could see them at it, chewing it like a cud. He was engrossed in it—Lucy watched him. "I say—two wives!" and then, giving it up, with a savage attack he bit into his apple and became incoherent. One cheek bulged dangerously and required all his present attention. Finally, after a time of high tension, Urquhart's wives and the apple were bolted together, and given over to the alimentary juices. The Turk in the almond-tree was lost sight of, and no one knows why he was there, or how he was got out—if indeed he ever was. For all that, Urquhart finished his story to his two ladies; but Lucy paid him divided attention, being more interested in her Lancelot than in Urquhart's Turk.

Francis Lingen, at the other table, kept a cold eye upon the easy man who was to provide him with ready money, as he hoped. He admired ease as much as anybody, and believed that he had it. But he was very much in love with Lucy, and felt the highest disapproval of Urquhart's kind of spread-eagle hardihood. He bent over his plate like the willow-tree upon one. His eyelids glimmered, he was rather pink, and used his napkin to his lips. To his neighbour of the left, who was Lady Bliss, he spoke *sotto voce* of "our variegated friend," and felt that he had disposed of him. But that "one of his wives" filled him with a sullen despair. What were you to do with that sort of man? Macartney saw all this and was dreadfully bored. "Damn Jimmy Urquhart," he said to himself. "Now I shall have to work for my living—which I hate, after dinner."

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But he did it. "We'll go and talk to the Judge," he said to his company, and led the way. Urquhart settled down to claret, and was taciturn. He answered Linden's tentative openings in monosyllables. But he and the Judge got on very well.

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CHAPTER III

IN THE DRAWING-ROOM

After dinner, when the men came into the drawing-room, Francis Lingen went directly to Lucy and began to talk to her. Lancelot fidgeted for Urquhart who, however, was in easy converse with the Judge and his host—looking at the water-colours as the talk went on, and cutting in as a thought struck him. Lucy, seeing that all her guests were reasonably occupied, lent herself to Lingen's murmured conversation, and felt for it just so much tolerance, so much compassion, you may say, as to be able to brave Mabel's quizzing looks from across the room. Mabel always had a gibe for Francis Lingen. She called him the Ewe Lamb, and that kind of thing. It was plain that she scorned him. Lucy, on the other hand, pitied him without knowing it, which was even more desperate for the young man. It had never entered Lingen's head, however, that anybody could pity him. True, he was poor; but then he was very expensive. He liked good things; he liked them choice. And they must have distinction; above all, they must be rare. He had some things which were unique: a chair in ivory and bronze, one of a set made for Mme. de Lamballe, and two of Horace Walpole's snuff-boxes. He had a private printing-press, and did his own poems, on vellum. He had turned off a poem to Lucy while she was inspecting the *appareil* once. "To L. M. from the Fount." "Sonnets while you wait," said Mabel, curving her upper lip; but there was nothing in it, because many ladies had received the same tribute. He had borrowed that too from Horace

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Walpole, and only wanted notice. Now you don't pity a man who can do these things, even if he has got no money; and for what else but want of money could you pity a man of taste?

I believe myself that both Mabel and Lucy overrated Francis Lingen's attentions. I don't think that they amounted to much more than providing himself with a sounding-board, and occasional looking-glass. He loved to talk, and to know himself listened to; he loved to look and to know himself looked at. You learned a lot about yourself that way. You saw how your things were taken. A poet—for he called himself poet, and had once so described himself in a hotel visitors' book—a poet can only practise his art by exerting it, and only learn its effect by studying his hearers. He preferred ladies for audience, and one lady at a time: there were obvious reasons for that. Men never like other men's poetry. Wordsworth, we know, avowedly read but his own.

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But Mabel, and Lucy too, read all sorts of implications. His lowered tones, his frequency, his persistence—"My dear, he caresses you with his eyes. You know he does," Mabel used to say. Lucy wondered whether he really did, and ended by supposing it.

Just now, therefore, Francis Lingen flowed murmuring on his way, like a purling brook, rippling, fluctuant, carrying insignificant straws, insects of the hour, on his course, never jamming, or heaving up, monotonous but soothing. And as for implications—! Good Heavens, he was stuffed with them like a Michaelmas goose.... "I do so wish that you could talk with her. You could do so much to straighten things out for the poor child. You are so wise. There's a kind of balm in your touch upon life, something that's aromatic and healing at once. *Sainfoin*, the healing herb—that should be your emblem. I have always thought so. By the by, have you an emblem? I wish you'd let me find you one. Old Gerrard will give it me—and I will give it to you. Some patient, nimble-fingered good soul has coloured my copy. You shall have it faithfully rendered; and it shall be framed by Le Nôtre of Vigo Street—do you know his work? You must—and stand on your writing-table.... I see you are shaping a protest. Frugality? Another of your shining qualities. Not of mine? No, no. I admire it in you. It is not a manly virtue. A 'frugal swain' means a harassed wife. Now, confess. Would you have me board? I believe I would do it if you asked me...." Not very exciting, all this; but if you want implications—!

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It was while this was going on that Lancelot, hovering and full of purpose, annexed Urquhart. The Judge, suddenly aware of him between them, put a hand upon his head as you might fondle the top of a pedestal—which Lancelot, intent upon his prey, endured. Then his moment came, a decent subsidence of anecdotes, and his upturned eyes caught Urquhart's.

"I say, will you come and see my orange-tree? It's just over there, in the conservatory. It's rather interesting—to me, you know."

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Urquhart considered the proposition. "Yes," he said, "I'll do that." And they went off, Lancelot on tiptoe. Lucy's attention strayed.

The orange-tree was exhibited, made the most of; its history was related. There was nothing more to say about it. Lancelot, his purpose growing, gave a nervous laugh.

"No Turk could hide in that, I expect," he said, and trembled. Urquhart gazed at the weedy little growth.

"No," he said, "he couldn't—yet. But a ladybird could." He picked out a dormant specimen. But Lancelot was now committed to action beyond recall. The words burned his lips. "I say," he said, twiddling a leaf of his orange-tree, "I expect you've been a pirate?"

The Judge had wandered in, and was surveying the pair, his hands deep in his trousers-pockets.

Urquhart nodded. "You've bit it," he said.

Lancelot had been certain of it. Good Lord! The questions crowded upon him. "What kind of a ship was yours?"

"She was a brigantine. Fifteen hundred tons."

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"Oh! I say—" with the air of, You needn't tell me if you'd rather not—"was she a good one?"

"She was a clipper."

"What name?"

"The *Dog Star*."

This was beyond everything. "Oh—good. Did you ever hang fellows?"

"We did."

"Many?"

"Some."

He had expected that too. He felt that he was being too obvious. The man of the world in him came into use. "For treachery, I suppose, and that kind of thing?"

"Yes," said Urquhart, "and for fun, of course."

Lancelot nodded gloomily. "I know," he said.

"So does Sir Matthew, now," he said. "You've led me into admissions, you know."

"You are up to the neck," said the Judge. For a moment Lancelot looked shrewdly from one to the other. Was it possible that—? No, no. He settled all that. "It's all right. He's a guest, you see—the same as you are."

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Urquhart was looking about him. "I should smoke a cigarette, if I had one," he said.

Lancelot's hospitality was awake. "Come into Father's room. He has tons." He led the way for his two friends. They pierced the conservatory and entered another open glass door. They were now in James's private room.

On the threshold Lancelot paused to exhibit what he said was a jolly convenient arrangement. These were two bay windows, with two glass doors. Between them stretched the conservatory. "Jolly convenient," said Lancelot. "What, for burglars?" the Judge asked. "Yes, for burglars, and policemen, and Father, you know ... I don't think," said the terse Lancelot. "Why don't you think, my friend?" says the Judge, and Lancelot became cautious. "Oh, Father won't come into the drawing-room if he can possibly help it. He says it's Mamma's province—but I expect he's afraid of meeting women, I mean ladies." Urquhart blinked at him. "'Never be afraid of any one' will do for you and me," he said; and Lancelot said deeply, "Rather not." Then they went into the misogynist's study. The Judge and Urquhart were accommodated with cigarettes, and Lancelot entertained them. But he did not pry any further into Urquhart's past. A hint had been enough.

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Conversation was easy. Lancelot talked freely of his father. "Father will be awfully waxy with me for not going to bed. He might easily come in here—hope he won't, all the same. But do you know what he likes? He likes the same things to happen at the same time every day. Now Mamma and I don't agree with him, you see. So it's rather pink sometimes."

"I expect it is," Urquhart said.

"Mamma of course likes to be quiet a bit. She doesn't like ructions—hay, and all that. So I keep myself pretty close."

"Quite right," said the Judge.

"I know," Lancelot said, dreamily, and then with great briskness, "Beastly grind, all the same." The Judge had a fit of coughing, and Urquhart got up and looked about. Then the Judge said that he too should catch it if he didn't go back and make himself polite.

Lancelot led the way back, but at the entry of the drawing-room, where the talk was buzzing like bees in a lime-tree, he put his hand on the switch, and showed the whites of his eyes. "Shall I dare you to switch it off?" he said to Urquhart, who replied, "Don't, or I shall do it." Lancelot and he entered the room; but before the Judge followed there was a momentary flicker of the lights. Lancelot nudged Urquhart. "*He's* all right," he said out of one corner of his mouth. "Oh, he's all right," Urquhart agreed.

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They both went to Lucy, and Lingen looked mildly round, interrupted in his flow. Lancelot's greeting was, "Darling, you really must go to bed." He knew it. It was so obvious—the abhorrent eyeglass apart—that he didn't even try the pathetic "Only a week before school."

He got up, enquiring of his mother if she would swear to come up presently. "Well, good-bye," he said to Urquhart, and held out his hand.

"Good night to you," said Urquhart. "Anyhow, you know the worst."

But Lancelot shook his cautious head. "No," he said, "not the worst"—and then with a deep chuckle, "but the best. Hoho! Two wives!" With that he went.

"Jolly chap," said Urquhart, and sat himself down by Lucy, to Lingen's inexpressible weariness. She warmed to his praise, but denied him, her conscience at work. "No, you mustn't sit down. I shall take you to talk to Lady Bliss. You'll like her."

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"No, I shan't," he said. "I can see that. And she'll think I've corrupted her husband." But he had to go. Lingen, also, she recruited for service. He had had a good innings and found himself able to be enthusiastic about Urquhart. He could bear to discuss him—in possible relations with himself, of course. Miss Bacchus sized him up aloud, according to her habit. "Jimmy Urquhart—a good man? Yes, he's a live man. No flies on Jimmy Urquhart. Been everywhere, had a bit of most things. Why, I suppose Jimmy has eaten more things than you've ever read about."

"I've read Brillat-Savarin," said Lingen modestly.

"I dare say Jimmy's had a notch out of *him*," said Miss Bacchus. "He's what I call a blade."

Lingen didn't ask her what she called him.

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CHAPTER IV

AFTER-TALK

Nevertheless the two men talked down to Knightsbridge together, and Lingen did most of the talking. He chose to expand upon Macartney, the nearest he dared get to the subject of his thoughts. "Now Macartney, you know, is a very self-contained man. No doubt you've noticed how he shies at expression. Chilling at times. Good in a lawyer, no doubt. You get the idea of large reserves. But perhaps as a—well, as a father, for instance— That bright boy of theirs now. You may have noticed how little there is between them. What do you think of the Spartan parent—in these days?"

"Oh, I think Mr. Lancelot can hold his own," said Urquhart. "He'll do—with his mother to help. I don't suppose the Spartan boy differed very much from any other kind of boy. Mostly they haven't time to notice anything; but they are sharp as razors when they do."

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An eager note could be detected in Francis Lingen's voice, almost a crow. "Ah, you've noticed then! The mother, I mean. Mrs. Macartney. Now, there again, I think our friend overdoes the repression business. A sympathetic attitude means so much to women."

"She'll get it, somewhere," said Urquhart shortly.

"Well," said Lingen, "yes, I suppose so. But there are the qualifications of the martyr in Mrs. Macartney."

"Greensickness," Urquhart proposed; "is that what you mean?"

Lingen stared. "It had not occurred to me. But now you mention it—well, a congestion of the faculties, eh?"

"I don't know anything about it," said Urquhart. "She seemed to me a fond mother, and very properly. Do you mean that Macartney neglects her?"

Lingen was timid by nature. "Perhaps I went further than I should. I think that he takes a great deal for granted."

"I always thought he was a supercilious ass," said Urquhart, "but I didn't know that he was a damned fool."

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"I say,"—Lingen was alarmed. "I say, I hope I haven't made mischief." Urquhart relieved him. "Bless you, not with me. I use a lawyer for law. He's no fool there."

"No, indeed," Lingen said eagerly. "I've found him most useful. In fact, I trust him further than any man I know."

"He's a good man," Urquhart said, "and he's perfectly honest. He'd sooner put you off than on, any day. That's very sound in a lawyer. But if he carries it into wedlock he's a damned fool, in my opinion."

They parted on very good terms, Lingen for the Albany, Urquhart elsewhere.

Meantime Lancelot, wriggling in his bed, was discussing Urquhart. "I say, Mamma," he said—a leading question—"do you think Mr. Urquhart really had two wives?"

"No, darling, I really don't. I think he was pulling our legs."

That was bad. "All our legs?"

"All that were pullable. Certainly your two."

"Perhaps he was." Lancelot sighed. "Oh, what happened to the Turk? I forgot him, thinking of his wives.... He said, 'one of my wives,' you know. He might have had six then.... I say, perhaps Mr. Urquhart is a Turk in disguise. What do you think?"

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Lucy was sleepy, and covered a yawn. "I don't think, darling. I can't. I'm going to bed, and you are going to sleep. Aren't you now?"

"Yes, of course, yes, of course. Did I tell you about the pirate part? His ship was a brigantine ... called the *Dog Star*."

"Oh, was it?"

"Yes, it was. And he used to hang the chaps, sometimes for treachery, and sometimes for fun."

"How horrid!" said Lucy. "Good night."

"Oh, well," came through the blankets, "of course you don't understand, but I do. Good night." And he was asleep at the turn of that minute.

James had disappeared into his room, so she took herself off to bed. Surely he might have said a word! It had all gone off so well. Mr. Urquhart had been such a success, and she really liked him very much. And how the Judge had taken to him! And how Lancelot! At the first stair she stopped, in three quarters of a mind to go in and screw a sentence out of him. But no! She feared the angry blank of the eyeglass. Trailing up to bed, she thought that she could date the crumbling of her married estate by the ascendancy of the eyeglass. And to think, only to think, that when she was engaged to James she used to play with it, to try it in her eye, to hide it from him! Well, she had Lancelot—her darling boy. That brought to mind that, a week to-night, she would be orphaned of him. The day she dreaded was coming again—and the blank weeks and months

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which followed it.

True to his ideas of "discipline," of the value of doing a thing well for its own sake, Macartney was dry about the merits of the dinner-party when they met at breakfast. "Eh? Oh, yes, I thought it went quite reasonably. Urquhart talked too much, I thought."

"My dear James,"—she was nettled—"you really are—"

He looked up; the eyeglass hovered in his hand. "*Plait-il?*"

"Nothing. I only thought that you were hard to please."

"Really? Because I think a man too vivacious?"

Lancelot said to his porridge-bowl, over the spoon, "I think he's ripping."

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"You've hit it," said his father. "He'd rip up anybody."

Lucy, piqued upon her tender part, was provoked into what she always avoided if she could—acrimony at breakfast.

"I was hostess, you see; and I must say that the more people talk the more I am obliged to them. I suppose that you asked Mr. Urquhart so that he might be amusing...."

James's head lifted again. You could see it over the *Morning Post*. "I asked Urquhart for quite other reasons, you remember."

"I don't know what they were," said Lucy. "My own reason was that he should make things go. 'A party in a parlour...'" She bit her lip. The *Morning Post* quivered but recovered itself.

"What was the party in a parlour, Mamma? Do tell me." That was Lancelot, with a *flair* for mischief.

"It was 'all silent and all damned,'" said Lucy.

"Jolly party," said Lancelot. "Not like yours, though." The *Morning Post* clacked like a bellying sail, then bore forward over an even keel. Lucy, beckoning Lancelot, left the breakfast-room.

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She was ruffled, and so much so that Lancelot noticed it, and, being the very soul of tact where she was concerned, spoke neither of his father nor of Urquhart all the morning. In the afternoon the weather seemed more settled, and he allowed himself more play. He would like to see Mr. Urquhart on horseback, in a battle, he thought. He expected he'd be like Henry of Navarre. Lucy thought that he might be. Would he wear a white plume though? Much head-shaking over this. "Bareheaded, I bet you. He's just that sort. Dashing about! Absolutely reckless!—frightfully dangerous!—a smoking sword!—going like one o'clock! Oh, I bet you what you like." Then with startling conviction, "Father doesn't like him. Feels scored off, I expect. He wasn't though, but he might be, all the same ... I think Father always expects he's going to be scored off, don't you? At any minute." Lucy set herself to combat this hazard, which was very amusing and by no means a bad shot. Poor James! What a pity it was that he couldn't let himself like anybody. It was true—it was quite true—he was afraid of being scored off. She husbanded a sigh. "Poor James!"

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To pity James was a new experience. She felt all the better for it, and was able to afford a lighter hand when they met at dinner. It may even be that James himself had thought the time come for a little relaxation of *askêsis*, or he may have had something to forestall: he seldom spoke of his affairs without design. At any rate, he told her that Francis Lingen had been with him, and that Urquhart was likely to be of use. "I've written to him, anyhow. He will do as he thinks well. Urquhart is a sharp man of business."

Lucy said, "He struck me so. I thought that he could never have any doubt of his own mind."

James wriggled his eyeglass, to wedge it more firmly. "Ah, you noticed that? Very acute of you, Lucy. We may have a meeting before long—to arrange the whole thing.... It's a lot of money ... ten thousand pounds.... Your Francis is an expensive young man ... or let's say *ci-devant jeune homme*."

"Why do you call him 'my' Francis?" she asked—rather mischievous than artless.

The eyeglass dropped with a click and had to be sought. "Well, I can hardly call him *mine*, could I?"

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"I don't see why he should be anybody's," said Lucy, "except his own."

"My dear girl," said Macartney, "*himself* is the last person he belongs to. Francis Lingen will always belong to somebody. I must say that he has chosen very wisely. You do him a great deal of good."

"That's very nice of you," she said. "I own that I like Francis Lingen. He's very gentle, not too foolish, and good to look at. You must own that he's extremely elegant."

"Oh," said James, tossing up his foot, "elegant! He is what his good Horace would have called 'a very pretty fellow'—and what I call 'a nice girl.'"

"I'm sure he isn't worth so much savagery," Lucy said. "You are like Ugolino—and poor Francis is your *fiero pasto*."

James instantly corrected himself. "My besetting sin, Lucy. But I must observe—" He applied his glazed eye to her feet—"the colour of your stockings, my friend. Ha! a tinge of blue, upon my oath!" So it passed off, and that night when, after his half-hour with the evening paper in the drawing-room, he prepared to leave her, she held out her hand to him, and said good night. He took it, waved it; and then stooped to her offered cheek and pecked it delicately. The good girl felt quite elate. She did so like people to be kind to her.

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Half an hour later yet, in her evening post was a letter from Urquhart. He proposed for herself and Lancelot to go to the play with him. The play, *Raffles*, "which ought to meet the case," he said. He added, "I don't include Macartney in this jaunt, partly because he won't want to come, but mainly because there won't be room for him. I am taking a nephew, one Bob Nugent, an Osborne boy, but very gracious to poor civilians like Lancelot and me." He signed himself, "Yours to command."

Lucy was pleased, and accepted promptly; and Lancelot was pleased when he heard of it. His hackles were up at the graciousness of the Osborne kid. He honked over it like a heron. "Ho! I expect you'll tell him that I'm R. E., or going to be," he said, which meant that he himself certainly would. The event, with subsequent modifications on the telephone, proved to be the kind of evening that Lancelot's philosophy had never dreamed of. They dined at the Café Royal, where Urquhart pointed out famous Anarchists and their wives to his young guests; they went on to the theatre in what he called a 'bus, but Lancelot saw to be a mighty motor which rumbled like a volcano at rest, and proceeded by a series of violent rushes, accompanied by explosions of a very dangerous kind. The whole desperate passage, short as it was, had the right feeling of law-breaking about it. Policemen looked reproachfully at them as they fled on. Lancelot, as guest of honour, sat in front, and wagged his hand like a semaphore at all times and in all faces; he felt part policeman and part malefactor, which was just right. Then they thrilled at the smooth and accomplished villainy of Mr. Du Maurier, lost not one line of his faultless clothes, nor one syllable of his easy utterance, "like treacle off a spoon," said Urquhart; and then they tore back through the starry night to Onslow Square, leaving in their wake the wrecks and salvage of a hundred frail taxis; finally, from the doorstep waved the Destroyer, as the boys agreed she should be called, upon her ruthless course, listened to the short and fierce bursts of her wrath until she was lost in the great sea of sound; and then—replete to speechlessness—Lancelot looked up to his mother and squeezed her hand. She saw that his eyes were full. "Well, darling?" she said. "You liked all that?" Lancelot had recovered himself. He let go her hand. His reply was majestic. "Not bad," he said. Lucy immediately hugged him.

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Now that was exactly what James would have said, *mutatis mutandis*. Yet she would not have hugged James for it, nor have loved him because of it. "These are our crosses, Mr. Wesley!" Reflecting on the jaunt, she warmed to the thought of Urquhart, who had, she felt, the knack of making you at ease. What had he done, or how done it? Well, he seemed to be interested in what you said. He looked at you, and waited for it; then he answered, still looking at you. Now, so many men looked at their toes when they answered you. James always did. Yet Mr. Urquhart did not look too much: there were men who did that. No, not too much.

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CHAPTER V

EROS STEPS IN

When she was told that Francis Lingen and Urquhart were coming on the nineteenth, not to dine, Lucy said, "Oh, what a bore!" and seeing the mild shock inflicted on the eyeglass by her remark, explained that it was Lancelot's day for going to school, and that she was always depressed at such times. The eyeglass dropped, and its master stretched out his fine long legs, with a great display of black speckled sock. "My dear, absurd as it may seem, they are coming to see Me. I know your little way. You shan't be disturbed, if I may be indulged so far as to contrive that the house hold us both. I had thought that it would be only civil to bring them in to you for a minute or two, when they've done. But that is for you to decide."

She was immediately penitent. "Oh, do, of course. I daresay they will be useful. I'm very foolish to miss him so much." The eyeglass ruefully stared at the fire.

"Urquhart consents," said James, "and Lingen will have his money. More snuff-boxes, you'll find. But he's had to work for it. Insured his life—and a letter from Sir Giles, which must have cost him something." Sir Giles Lingen was the uncle of Francis, a childless veteran. He turned his disk upon her for a moment. "You like Urquhart?"

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"Yes," Lucy said, "I do. I like him—because he likes Lancelot."

"Ah," said James, who thought her weak where the boy was concerned. He added, "Urquhart gets on with children. He's a child himself."

"Why do you call him that?" she asked, with a tinge of offence in her voice. James could raise the fine hairs at the back of her neck by a mere inflection.

He accepted battle. "Because he only thinks of one thing at a time. Because to get what he wants he'll sacrifice every mortal thing—very often the thing itself which he's after."

But Lucy had heard all that before, and wasn't impressed. "All men are like that," she said. "I could give you a much better reason."

James and his eyeglass both smiled. "Your exquisite reason?"

"He is like a child," said Lucy, "because he doesn't know that anybody is looking at him, and wouldn't care if anybody was." [Pg 55]

James clasped his shin. "Not bad," he said, "not at all bad. But the test of that is the length to which you can carry it. Would he wear a pot hat with a frock-coat?—that's the crux."

It really was, to James, as she knew very well. She perused the glowing fire with its blue salt flames. Perhaps to most men. Probably also to Mr. Urquhart. But she felt that she would be lowering a generous ideal if she probed any further: so James was left to his triumph.

The fatal week wore on apace; one of the few remaining days was wholly occupied with preparations for the last. A final jaunt together was charged with a poignancy of unavailing regrets which made it a harder trial than the supreme moment. Never, never, had she thought this bright and intense living thing which she had made, so beautiful and so dear. Nor did it make a straw's worth of difference to the passion with which she was burdened that she felt precisely the same thing every time he left her. As for Lancelot, he took her obvious trouble like the gentleman he was. He regretted it, made no attempt to conceal that, but was full of little comfortable suggestions which made her want to cry. "You'll have no more sapping upstairs directly after dinner, I suppose!" was one of them; another was, "No more draughty adventures by the Round Pond." Lucy thought that she would have stood like Jane Shore by the Round Pond, in a blizzard, for another week of him. But she adored him for his intention, and was also braced by it. Her sister Mabel, who had three boys, did not conceal her satisfaction at the approaching release—but Mabel spent Christmas at Peltry; and the hunting was a serious matter. [Pg 56]

The worst of her troubles was over when they were at Victoria. Lancelot immediately became one of a herd. And so did she: one of a herd of hens at the pond's edge. Business was business. Lancelot remained kind to her, but he was inflexible. This was no place for tears. He even deprecated the last hug, the lingering of the last kiss. He leaned nonchalantly at the window, he kept his eye on her; she dared not have a tear. The train moved; he lifted one hand. "So long," he said, and turned to his high affairs. She was almost aghast to realise how very small, how very pale, how atomy he looked—to confront a howling world! And so to listen to the comfortable words of Mrs. Furnivall-Briggs. "My dear, they've no use for us. The utmost we can do is to see that they have good food. And warm socks. I am untiring about warm socks. That is what I am always girding my committee about. I tell the Vicar, 'My dear sir, I will give you their souls, if you leave me their soles.' Do you see? He is so much amused. But he is a very human person. Except at the altar. *There* he's every inch the priest. Well, good-bye. I thought Lancelot looked delightful. He's taller than my Geoff. But I must fly. I have a meeting of workers at four-fifteen. Bless me, I had no idea it was four o'clock. The parish-room, Alphonse." A Spartan mother. [Pg 57]

Lucy paid two calls, on people who were out, and indulged herself with shopping in Sloane Street. Lancelot had recently remarked on her gloves. "You have jolly thin hands," he had said. "It's having good gloves, I expect." The memory of such delightful sayings encouraged her to be extravagant. She thought that perhaps he would find her ankles worth a moment—if she took pains with them. Anyhow, he was worth dressing for. James never noticed anything—or if he did, his ambiguity was two-edged. "Extraordinary hat," he might say, and drop his eyeglass, which always gave an air of finality to comments of the sort. But her shopping done, for Lancelot's sake, life stretched before her a grey waste. She went back to tea, to a novel, to a weekly paper full of photographs of other people's houses, dogs, children and motor-cars. It was dark, she was bored as well as child-sick, dissatisfied with herself as well as heart-hungry. She must get herself something to do, she said. Who was the Vicar of Onslow Square? She didn't know. Somehow, religion, to her, had always seemed such a very private affair. Not a soul must be near her when she said her prayers—except Lancelot, of course. When he was at home she always said them while he said his. Last night—ah, she had not been able to say anything last night. All her faculties had been bent to watching him at it. Was it bravery in him—or insensibility? She remembered Mr. Urquhart had talked about it. "All boys are born stoics," he said, "and all girls Epicureans. That's the instinct. They change places when they grow up." Was James an Epicurean? [Pg 58]

It was six o'clock. They would be at their meeting in James's room. Surely they wouldn't want tea? Apparently Crewdson thought that they might, otherwise—well, she would leave it to Crewdson. James never seemed to care for anything done by anybody except Crewdson. Sometimes he seemed to resent it. "Have we no servants then?" the eyeglass seemed to inquire. She wondered if James knew for how much his eyeglass was answerable. How could one like to be kissed, with that glaring disk coming nearer and nearer? And if it dropped just at the moment—well, it seemed simply to change all one's feelings. Oh, to have her arms round Lancelot's salient young body, and hear him murmur, "Oh, I say!" as she kissed his neck!... [Pg 59]

At this moment, being very near to tears, the light was switched off. She seemed to be drowning in dark. That was a favourite trick of Lancelot's, who had no business, as a matter of fact, in his father's room. It gave her a moment of tender joy, and for another she played with the thought of

him, tiptoeing towards her. Suddenly, all in the dark, she felt a man's arms about her, and a man's lips upon hers. To wild alarm succeeded warm gratitude. Lucy sobbed ever so lightly; her head fell back before the ardent advance; her eyes closed. With parted lips she drank deep of a new consolation: her heart drummed a tune to which, as it seemed, her wings throbbed the answer. The kiss was a long one—perhaps a full thirty seconds—but she was released all too soon. He left her as he had come, on silent feet. The light was turned up; everything looked as it had been, but everything was not. She was not. She found herself an Ariadne, in a drawing-room, still lax from Theseus' arms. Yes, but Theseus was next door, and would come back to her.

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To say that she was touched is to say little. She was more elated than touched, and more interested than either. How utterly romantic, how perfectly sweet, how thoughtful, how ardent of James! James, of all people in the world! Her husband, of course: but who knew better than she what that office had implied—and who less than she what it must have hidden? Really, was it true? Could it be true?

For some time she sat luxurious where she had been left, gloating (the word is fairly used) over this new treasure. But then she jumped up and looked at herself in the glass, curiously, quizzingly, and even perhaps shamefaced. Next she laughed, richly and from a full heart. "My dear girl, it's not hard to see what has happened to you. You've been—" Not even in her thoughts did she care to end the sentence. But those shining dark eyes, that air of floating, of winged feet—"Ha, my dear, upon my word! At thirty-one, my child. Really, it becomes you uncommonly."

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She found herself now walking swiftly up and down the room, clasping and unclasping her hands. To think that James—the last man in the world—had kept this up his coat-sleeve for years—and at last—! And how like the dear thing to turn the light out! To save his own face, of course, for he must have known, even *he* must have known, that *she* wouldn't have cared. She would have liked the light—to see his eyes! There had been no eyeglass this time, anyhow. But that was it. That was a man's romance. In *Cupid and Psyche*, it had been Psyche who had wanted to know, to see. Women were like that. Such realists. And, as Psyche was, they were always sorry for it afterwards. Well, bless him, he should love her in the dark, or how he pleased.

She stopped again—again in front of the glass. What had he seen—what new thing had he seen to make him—want to kiss her like that? Was she pretty? She supposed that she really was. She fingered the crinkled whiteness at her neck; touched herself here and there; turned her head sideways, and patted her hair, lifting her chin. Now, was there anything she could put on—something she could put in—for dinner? Her thoughts were now turned to serious matters—this and that possibility flashed across her mind. They were serious matters, because James had made them so by his most extraordinary, most romantic, most beautiful action. Then she stretched out her hands, the palms upward, and sighed out her heart. "Oh, what a load is lightened. Oh, days to come!"

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Voices in the conservatory suddenly made her heart beat violently. He was coming! She heard James say—oh, the rogue!—"Yes, it's rather nice. We put it up directly we came. Lucy's idea. Mind the little step at the door, though." Urquhart, Francis Lingen were in the room—Francis' topknot stood up like a bottle-brush. Then came the hero of the evening, James, the unknown Eros. She beamed into the shining disk. Sweet old spyglass, she would never abuse it again. All the same, he had pocketed it for the occasion the last time he had been in the room!

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Urquhart refused tea. "Tea at seven o'clock at night!" All her eyes were for James, who had sought her in love and given her heart again. The eyeglass expressed its horror of tea at seven o'clock. "God forbid," said James, dear, ridiculous creature.

Mr. Urquhart talked at once of Lancelot. "Well, he's off with all the rest of them. They love it, you know. It's movement—it's towards the unknown, the not impossible—the 'anything might turn up at any minute.' Now, we don't feel so sure about the minutes, do we?"

Oh, don't we though? She laughed and tilted her chin. "We feel, anyhow, for *their* minutes, bless them," she said, and Urquhart looked at her with narrowed eyes.

"He for God only, she for God in him," he said. He added, "I like that boy of yours. I think he understands me"—and pleased her.

There were a few minutes' desultory talk, in the course of which Lucy gravitated towards James, and finally put her hand in his arm. You should have seen the effect of this simple caress upon the eyeglass. Like a wounded snake it lifted its head to ask, "Who has struck me?" It wavered and waggled. But Lucy was glass-proof now.

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Urquhart said that he was going away shortly, at least he supposed he should. A man he knew wanted to try a new motor. They were to rush down to Biarritz, and possibly over the frontier to Pampluna. But nothing was arranged. Here he looked scrutinising and half quizzical at her. "Are you adventurously inclined? Will you try my monster? It's a dragon."

She was very adventurously inclined—as James might know! but not with a Mr. Urquhart necessarily: therefore she hesitated. "Oh, I don't really know—" Urquhart laughed. "Be bold—be bold—be not too bold. Well, there it is. I start for the Newmarket road at eleven to-morrow—but I'll fetch you for twopence. Ask *him*." He jerked his head forward towards James, on whose arm her hand rested. Lucy looked up at her romantic lord—a look which might have made a man proud. But James may have been proud enough already. At any rate, he didn't see her look, but was genial to Urquhart—over whom he considered that he had triumphed in the library.

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"Sooner her than me," he said. "I know that she likes it and so advise her to go. But I should die a thousand deaths."

"She won't," said Urquhart; and then to Lucy, "Well, ma'am?"

Her eyes assented before she did. "Very well, I'll come. I dare say it will be delightful."

"Oh, it will," he said.

Still he rambled on—plain, grumbling, easy, familiar talk, while Lucy fumed and fidgeted to be alone with her joy and pride. "Your handsome sister has asked me to hunt in Essex. Don't like hunting, but I do like her—and there's a great deal waiting to be done at Martley. I don't know. We'll talk about it to-morrow." Then he asked her, "Would she come and look at Martley?" It seemed she had half promised.

She said, "Oh, yes, of course." Nothing of that kind seemed very important. But James here looked down at her, which made it different. "We might go at Whitsuntide," he said.

She looked deeply up—deeply into him, so to speak. "Very well, we will. If you'll come."

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"Oh, he'll come," Urquhart said; and James, "I should like it." So that was settled. Heavens, how she wished these people would go. She could see that Francis Lingen wanted to be asked to stay to dine, but she didn't mean to have that. So when Urquhart held out his hand with a blunt "Good night to you," she let hers hover about Francis as if his was waiting for it—which it wasn't, but had to be. "Oh, good night," said the embarrassed exquisite, and forgot to be tender.

James picked up the evening paper and was flickering his eye over the leading articles, like a searchlight. Lucy, for her part, hovered quick-footed in his neighbourhood. This was her hour of triumph, and she played with it. She peeped at the paper over his shoulder till he said, "Please," and moved it. Her fingers itched to touch his hair, but very prudently refrained. She was too restless to settle to anything, and too happy to wish it. If she had been a singing-bird she would have trilled to the piano; but she had not a note of music. The dressing-gong gave her direction. There was plenty to be done. "The gong! I'm going to make myself smart, James. Quite smart. Are you coming up?"

James had the paper open in the middle. "Eh? Oh, there's lots of time—run away. I'm rather busy."

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"You're not a bit busy. But I'll go." And she went with hardly a perceptible hang-back at the door. Upstairs she rejected her usual choice with a curled lip. "No, no, too stuffy." "Oh, Smithers, I couldn't. It makes me look a hundred." No doubt she was absurd; but she had been starved. Such a thing as this had not happened to her since her days of betrothal, and then but seldom. When she had satisfied herself she had a panic. Suppose he said, "Comic Opera!"

He said nothing at all. He was in a thoughtful mood, and talked mostly of Urquhart's proposal for Whitsuntide. "I believe it's rather remarkable. Quite a place to be seen. Jimmy does things well, you know. He's really a rich man."

"As rich as you?" Lucy asked, not at all interested in Urquhart just now.

The eyeglass was pained. "My dear soul! You don't know what you're saying!" She quizzed him with a saucy look. "I didn't say anything, dear. I asked something."

If eyeglasses shiver, so did James's. "Well, well—you quibble. I dare say Urquhart has fifteen thousand a year, and even you will know that I haven't half as much."

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She quenched her eyes, and looked meek. "No, dear, I know. All right, he's quite rich. Now what does he do with it?"

"Do with it?" James tilted his head and scratched his neck vigorously, but not elegantly. "Very often nothing at all. There will be years when he won't spend a hundred above his running expenses. Then he'll get a kind of maggot in the brain, and squander every sixpence he can lay hands on. Or he may see reason good, and drop ten thousand in a lap like Lingen's. Why does he do it? God knows, Who made him. He's made like that."

Lucy said it was very interesting, but only because she thought James would be pleased.

Then she remembered, with a pang of doubt, that she was to be driven by this wild man to-morrow. But James—would he—? He had never been really jealous, and just now she didn't suppose he could possibly be so; but you can't tell with men. So she said, "James dear," very softly, and he looked over the table at her. "If you don't think it—sensible, I could easily telephone."

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"Eh? What about?—to whom?—how? I don't follow you."

"I mean to Mr. Urquhart, about his motor to-morrow. I don't care about it in the least. In fact—"

"Oh," said James, "the motor? Ah, I had forgotten. Oh, I think you might go. Urquhart's been very reasonable about this business of Lingen's. I had a little trouble, of course—it's a lot of money, even for him. Oh, yes, I should go if I were you. Why, he might want *me* to go, you know—which would bore me to extinction. But I know you like that sort of thing." He nodded at her. "Yes, I should go."

She pouted, and showed storm in her eyes—all for his benefit. But he declined benefit. A strange, dear, bleak soul.

"Very well. If it saves you anything, I'll do it," she said. James was gratified; as he was also by the peeling of walnuts and service of them in a sherry glass, which she briskly performed, as if she liked it. Further than that she was too shy to go; but in the drawing-room, before it might be too late, she was unable to forbear her new tenderness.

She stood behind him; her hand fell upon his shoulder, and rested there, like a leaf. He could not but be conscious of it—he was very conscious of it, and accepted it, as a tribute. Such a tribute was gratifying. Lucy was a charming woman. She did pretty things in a pretty way, as a man's wife should, but too seldom did. How many men's wives—after fourteen years of it—would stand as she was standing now? No—the luck held. He had a tradition of Success—success without visible effort. The luck held! Like a steady wind, filling a sail.

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Discipline, however; gentle but firm! He went on reading, but said, most kindly, "Well, Luce, well—" adding, on an afterthought, "How can I serve you?"

Her eyes were luminous, dilating her gentle mood, downcast towards his smooth black hair. She sighed, "Serve me? Oh, you serve me well. I'm happy just now—that's all."

"Not fretting after the boy?"

"No, no. Not now. Bless him, all the same."

"To be sure." Whereon, at a closer touch of her hand, he looked comically up. Her head moved, ever so slightly, towards him. He dropped his eyeglass with a smart click and kissed her cheek. She shivered, and started back. A blank dismay fell upon her; her heart seemed to stop. Good Heavens! Not so, not at all so, had James kissed her in the dark.

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There wasn't a doubt about that—not the shade of a doubt. Here had been a brush on the cheek; here the cold point of his nose had pecked a little above. She had felt that distinctly, more distinctly than the touch of his lips. Whereas that other, that full-charged message of hope and promise—oh, that had been put upon her mouth, soft and close, and long. She recalled how her head had fallen back and back, how her laden heart had sighed, how she had been touched, comforted, contented. Good God, how strange men were! How entirely outside her philosophy!

She strayed about her drawing-room, touching things here and there, while he complacently fingered his *Punch*, flacking over the leaves with brisk slaps of the hand. At this moment he was as comfortably-minded a householder as any in London, engaged solely in digestion, at peace at home and abroad, so unconscious of the fretting, straining, passionate lost soul in the room with him, hovering, flicking about it like a white moth, as to be supremely ridiculous—to any one but Lucy. It is difficult to hit off her state of mind in a word, or in two. She was fretted; yes, but she was provoked too. She was provoked, but she was incredulous. It could not continue; it was too much. Men were not made so. And yet—and yet—James was a possible Eros, an Eros (bless him!) with an eyeglass: and Eros loved in the dark.

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She comforted herself with this thought, which seemed to her a bright solution of the puzzle, and saw James rise and stretch his length without mutiny. She received the taps on the cheek of his rolled *Punch*, allowed, nay, procured, another chilly peck, with no pouting lips, no reproachful eyes. Then came a jar, and her puzzlement renewed. "Shall you be late?" "Oh, my dear soul, how can I possibly say? I brought papers home with me—and you know what that means! It's an interesting case. We have Merridew for us. I am settling the brief." Alas, for her. The infatuate even stayed to detail points of the cause. Much, it appeared, depended upon the Chancellor of the diocese: a very shaky witness. He had a passion for qualification, and might tie himself into as many knots as an eel on a night-line. Oh, might he indeed? And this, this was in the scales against her pride and joy! She was left—alone on Naxos now—while James went sharply to his papers.

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There I must leave her, till the hour when she could bear the room no more. She had fought with beasts there, and had prevailed. Yet unreason (as she had made herself call it) lifted a bruised head at the last. Papers! Papers, after such a kiss! Oh, the folly of the wise! Caught up she knew not whence, harboured in the mind she knew not how, the bitter words of an old Scots song tasted salt upon her lips:

There dwelt a man into the West,
And O gin he was cruel;
For on his bridal night at e'en
He up and grat for gruel.

They brought him in a gude sheepshead,
A bason and a towel.
"Gar take thae whimwhams far frae me,
I winna want my gruel!"

Standing in the hall while these words were ringing in her head, she stayed after they were done, a rueful figure of indecision. Instinct fought instinct, and the acquired beat down the innate. She regarded the shut door, with wise and tender eyes, without reproach; then bent her head and went swiftly upstairs.

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CHAPTER VI

A LEAP OUTWARDS

She arose, a disillusioned bride, with scarcely spirit enough to cling to hope, and with less taste for Urquhart's motor than she had ever had for any duller task-work. Nothing in the house tended to her comfort. James was preoccupied and speechless; the coffee was wrong, the letters late and stupid. She felt herself at cross-purposes with her foolish little world. If James had resought her love overnight, it had been a passing whim. She told herself that love so desired was almost an insult.

Nevertheless at eleven o'clock the motor was there, and Urquhart in the hall held out his hand. "She can sprint," he said; "so much I've learned already. I think you'll be amused."

Lucy hoped so. She owned herself very dull that morning. Well, said Urquhart, he could promise her that she should not be that. She might cry for mercy, he told her, or stifle screams; but she wouldn't stifle yawns. "Macartney," he said, "would sooner see himself led out by a firing-party than in such an engine as I have out there." She smiled at her memory. "James is not of the adventurous," she said—but wasn't he? "Shall I be cold?"

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"Put on everything you have," he bade her, "and then everything else. She can do sixty."

"You are trying to terrify me," she said, "but you won't succeed. I don't know why, but I feel that you can drive. I think I have caught Lancelot's complaint."

"Perhaps so. I know that I impose upon the young and insipient."

"And which am I, pray?"

He looked at her. "Don't try me too far."

She came forth finally to see Crewdson and her own chauffeur grouped with Urquhart. The bonnet was open; shining coils, mighty cylinders were in view, and a great copper feed-pipe like a burnished boa-constrictor. The chauffeur, a beady-eyed Swiss, stared approval; Crewdson, rubbing his chin, offered a deft blend of the deferential butler and the wary man of the world. She was tucked in; the Swiss started the monster; they were off with a bound.

They slashed along Knightsbridge, won Piccadilly Circus by a series of short rushes; avoided the City, and further East found a broad road and slow traffic. Soon they were in the semi-urban fringe, among villa gardens, over-glazed public-houses, pollarded trees and country glimpses in between. There was floating ice on the ponds, a violet rime traversed with dun wheelmarks in the shady parts of the way. After that a smooth white road, deep green fields, much frozen water, ducks looking strangely yellow, and the low blue hills of Essex.

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Urquhart was a sensitive driver; she noticed that. The farseeing eye was instantly known in the controlling foot. He used very little brake; when he pushed his car there was no mark upon him of urgency. Success without effort! The Gospel of James! Urquhart accepted it as a commonplace, and sought his gospel elsewhere.

He began to talk without any palpable beginning, and drifted into reminiscence. "I remember being run away with by a mule train in Ronda ... the first I had ever handled. They got out of hand—it was a nasty gorge with a bend in it where you turn on to the bridge. I got round that with a well-directed stone which caught the off-side leader exactly at the root of his wicked ear. He had only one ear, so you couldn't mistake it. He ducked his head and up with his heels. He went over, and the next pair on top of him. We pulled up, not much the worse. Well, the point of that story is that the pace of that old coach and six mokes, I assure you, has always seemed to me faster than any motor I've ever driven. It was nothing to be compared with it, of course; but the effort of those six mad animals, the *élan* of the thing, the rumbling and swaying about, heeling over that infernal gorge of stone—! You can't conceive the whirl and rush of it. Now we're doing fifty, yet you don't know it. Wind-screen: yes, that's very much; but the concealment of effort is more."

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"You've had a life of adventure," she said. "Lancelot may have been right."

"He wasn't far wrong," Urquhart said. "As a fact, I have never been a pirate; but I have smuggled tobacco in the Black Sea, and that's as near as you need go. I excuse myself by saying that it was a long time ago—twenty years I dare say; that I was young at the time; that I was very hard up, and that I liked the fun. Lovely country, you know, that strip of shore. You never saw such oleanders in your life. And sand like crumbled crystal. We used to land the stuff at midnight, up to our armpits in water sometimes; and a man would stand up afterwards shining with phosphorus, like a golden statue. Romantic! No poet could relate it. They used to cross and recross in the starlight—all the gleaming figures. Like a ballet done for a Sultan in the Arabian Nights. I was at that for a couple of years, and then the gunboats got too sharp for us and the game didn't pay."

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She had forgotten her spleen. Her eyes were wide at the enlarging landscape. "And what did you do next—or what had you done before? Tell me anything."

"I really don't know what I did before. I went out to the Chersonese from Naples. I remember that

well. I had been knocking about Vesuvius for a bit, keeping very bad company, which, nevertheless, behaved very well to me. But finally there was a row with knives, which rather sickened me of the Vesuvians; so I shipped for Constantinople and fell in with a very nice old chap on board. He took me on at his contraband job. I didn't get very much money, but I got some, and saw a deal of life. When it was over I went to Greece. I like the Greeks. They are a fine people."

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"What did you do in Greece?" she insisted, not interested in the fineness of the people.

"Blasting, first," he said. "They were making the railway from Larissa through Tempe. That was a dangerous job, because the rock breaks so queerly. You never know when it has finished. I had seen a good deal of it in South America, so I butted in, and was taken on. Then I did some mining at Lavrion, and captained a steamer that carried mails among the islands. That was the best time I had. You see, I like responsibility, and I got it. Everything else was tame—out there, I mean...."

"I got into Government service at Corfù and stopped there six years or more ... I was all sorts of things—lighthouse-keeper, inspector of marine works, harbour-master ... And then my wicked old father (I must tell you about him some day. You could write a book about him) up and died—in his bed of all places in the world, and left me a good deal of money. That was the ruin of me. I really might have done something if it hadn't been for that. Strange thing! He turned me out of the house in a rage one day, and had neither seen me nor written me a letter from my seventeenth to my thirtieth birthday, when he died—or thereabouts. But at the last, when he was on his bed of death, he rolled himself over and said to the priest, 'There's Jimmy out at his devilry among the haythen Turks,' he says. 'Begob, that was a fine boy, and I'll leave him a plum.' And so he did. I wish he hadn't. I was making my hundred and fifty in Corfù and was the richest man in the place. And I liked the life."

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"That was where you had so many wives," she reminded him.

"So it was. Well, perhaps I needn't assure you that the number has been exaggerated. I've very nearly had some wives, but there was always something at the last minute. There was a girl at Valletta, I remember—a splendid girl with the figure of a young Venus, and a tragic face and great eyes that seemed to drown you in dark. Lady Macbeth as a child might have been like that—or Antigone with the doom on her, or perhaps Elektra. No, I expect Elektra took after her mother: red-haired girl, I fancy. But there you are. She was a lovely, solemn, deep-eyed, hag-ridden goose. Not a word to say—thought mostly of pudding. I found that out by supposing that she thought of me. Then I was piqued, and we parted. I suppose she's vast now, and glued to an upper window-ledge with her great eyes peering through a slat in the shutter. Living in a bed-gown. Imagine a wife who lives in a bed-gown!"

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They were lunching at Colchester when these amorous chapters were reached. Lucy was quite at her ease with her companion. "A wife who was always at the dressmaker's would suit you no better. But I don't know that mixed marriages often answer. After all, so dreadfully much can never be opened between you."

"That's quite true," he said, "and by no means only of mixed marriages. How much can your average husband and wife open between them? Practically nothing, since they choose to live by speech."

"But what else have we?"

"I would choose to live by touch," he said. "If two people can't communicate fully and sufficiently by the feelers they are not in the same sphere and have no common language. But speech is absurd. Why, every phrase, and nearly every word, has a conventional value."

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By touch! She was set dreaming by that. So she and James—a James she had had no conception of—had communicated not four-and-twenty hours ago. Certainly subsequent speech had not advanced the intelligence then conveyed.

But she resumed Urquhart's affairs. "And do you despair of finding a woman with whom you can hold communion?"

"No," he said, looking at the bread which he broke. "I don't despair at all. I think that I shall find her." And then he looked steadily at her, and she felt a little uncomfortable. But it was over in a minute.

She feared to provoke that again, so made no fishing comment; but she was abundantly curious of what his choice would be. Meantime he mused aloud.

"What you want for a successful marriage is—a layer of esteem, without which you will infallibly, if you are a man, over-reach yourself and be disgusted; then a liberal layer of animal passion—and I only shrink from a stronger word for fear of being misunderstood—which you won't have unless you have (a) vitality, (b) imagination; thirdly, for a crown, respect. You must know your due, and your duty, and fear to omit the one or excuse the other. Everything follows from those three."

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"And how do you know when you have found them?"

He looked up and out into the country. "A sudden glory," he said, "a flare of insight. There's no mistake possible."

"Who was the man," she asked him, rather mischievously, "who saw a girl at a ball, and said, 'That's a fine girl; I'll marry her'—and did it—and was miserable?"

He twinkled as he answered, "That was Savage Landor; but it was his own fault. He could never make concessions." She thought him a very interesting companion.

On the way home he talked more fitfully, with intervals of brooding silence. But he was not morose in his fits, and when he excused himself for sulking, she warmly denied that he did any such thing. "I expect you are studying the motor," she said; and he laughed. "I'm very capable of that."

Altogether, a successful day. She returned braced to her duties, her James, and his hidden-up Eros. To go home to James had become an exciting thing to do.

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CHAPTER VII

PATIENCE AND PSYCHE

There are two ways of encountering an anti-climax, an heroic, an unheroic. Lucy did her best to be a heroine, but her temperament was against her. Her imagination was very easily kindled, and her reasons much at the mercy of the flames. By how much she was exalted, by so much was she dashed. But she had a conscience too, a lively one with a forefinger mainly in evidence. It would be tedious to recount how often that wagged her into acquiescence with a James suddenly revealed freakish, and how often she relapsed into the despair of one sharply rebuffed when she found him sedately himself. However, or by means of her qualities, the time-cure worked its way; her inflammation wore itself out, and her life resumed its routine of dinner-parties, calls and callers, Francis Lingen's purring, and letters to or from Lancelot—with this difference, mind you, that far recessed in her mind there lay a grain, a grain of promise: that and a glamorous memory.

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She was able to write her first letter to Lancelot in high spirits, then, to tell him her little bits of news and to remind him (really to remind herself) of good days in the past holiday-time. Something she may have said, or left unsaid, as the chance may be, drew the following reply. She always wrote to him on Friday, so that he might answer her on Sunday.

"Dear Mama," he wrote, "I was third in weakly order which was rather good (I.d.t.)*. Mr. Tonks said if I go up so fast I shall brake the ceiling. Bad spelling I know but still. Last Wednesday a boy named Jenkinson swallowed a button-hook but recovered it practically as good as when bought (or perhaps a Xmas present). He was always called Bolter for a nickname, so it was jolly convene. For once he did the right thing. Mostly he is an utter ass. How is the polligamous pirate getting on with wives &c.? That comes from a Greek word πόλις, a city, so I suppose in the country they are too conventual. I like him awfully. He's my sort (not Father's though). Well, the term is waring away. Five days crost off on new diery. Where shall we go this time three months? Easter I mean. Wycross I hope, but suppose dreery Brighton, hope not. I must swot now Kings of Isereel and such-like so goodbye now or so long as we say here—LANCELOT."

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She thought that she must show the letter to Urquhart when next she saw him, and meantime, of course, showed it to James. The eyeglass grew abhorrent over the spelling. "This boy passes belief. Look at this, Lucy. C-e-i-a-ling!" "Oh, don't you see?" she cried. "He had it perfectly: c-e-i. Well, and then a devil of doubt came in, and he tried an *a*. Oh, I can see it now, on his blotting-pad! Whichever he decided on, he must have forgotten to cross out the other. You shouldn't be so hard on your own son. His first letter too."

James felt compunction. "No, no, I won't be hard. It's all right, of course." He read on. The polligamous pirate with wives &c. had to be explained. She told him the story. The eyeglass became a searchlight exploring her.

"Did Urquhart tell that tale? Upon my soul—!"

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"It was sheer nonsense, of course, but—"

"Oh, I don't know," said James. "You can't tell with a man of that sort. He can be a March hare if he's in the mood. He'd as soon shoot a Turk as a monkey, or keep two women as half a dozen. By the by, Lucy," and the eyeglass went out like a falling star, "don't let that sentimental idiot make too much of an ass of himself."

Lucy's eyes concentrated; they shone. "Who is your sentimental idiot? I haven't the least notion what you mean."

"I mean Francis Lingen, of course. You must admit— Oh," and he nipped her indignation in the bud, "I know you won't misunderstand me. I am not at all a fool. You are kindness itself, generosity itself. But there it is. He's an ass, and there's really nothing more to say."

Lucy was mollified. She was, indeed, amused after the first flash. Remembering the James of a week ago, the eager wooer of the dark, she was able to be playful with a little jealousy. But if he could have known—or if she had cared to tell him—what she had been thinking of on Sunday afternoon when Francis purred to her about himself and sought her advice how best to use his

So she laughed. "Poor Francis Lingen! He is not very wise. But I must say that your honour is perfectly safe with me."

"My dear child—" said James, frowning.

"No, no, I shall go on. It will do you good. There is one thing you may always be quite sure of, dear, and that is that the more Francis Lingen is a goose, the less likely I am to encourage him in goosery, if there is such a word."

James pished, but she pursued him. Mabel was announced, up from the country to dine and sleep. The Parthian shot was delivered actually on the way to Mabel's embrace. "But I'm flattered to see you jealous—please understand that. I should like you to be jealous of the chair I sit on."

James was hurt and uncomfortable. He thought all this rank form. And Mabel—the bright and incisive Mabel with her high hunting colour—made it much worse. "What! Is James jealous? Oh, how perfectly splendid! Is he going to give secret orders to Crewdson not to admit Mr.—? As they do in plays at the St. James's? Oh, James, do tell me whom you darkly suspect? Cæsar's wife! My dear and injured man—" James writhed, but he was in the trap. You may be too trenchant, it would seem, and your cleaver stick fast in the block.

It behooved him to take a strong line. This kind of raillery must be stopped. He must steer between the serious and the flippant. He hated to be pert; on the other hand, to be solemn would be offensive to Lucy—which he would not be. For James was a gentleman. "Mabel, my dear, you stretch the privileges of a guest—" a promising beginning, he thought; but Lucy pitied him plunging there, and cut all short by a way of her own. "Oh, Mabel, you are a goose. Come and take your things off, and tell me all about Peltry, and the hunting, and the new horse. Mr. Urquhart told me he was going to stay with you. Is he? I'm so glad you like him. Lancelot and I highly approve. I must show you Lancelot's letter about him. He calls him the polligamous pirate—with two /s of course."

"Yes," said James, who had recovered his composure, "yes, my dear; but he gives you the accent in πόλις."

"Does he though? I'm afraid that was beyond me." She paused to beam at James. "That pleases you?"

"It's a sign of grace, certainly." So the squall blew over.

James was dining out somewhere, so the sisters had a short dinner and a very long evening by the fire. Lucy dallied with her great news until Crewdson had served the coffee—then out it came, with inordinate and delightful delicacy of approach. Mabel's eyes throughout were fixed upon her face.... "And of course, naturally—" Here Lucy turned away her own. "But nothing—not a sign. Neither then nor since. I—"; she stopped, bit her lip, then broke forth. "I shall never understand it. Oh, I do think it extraordinary!"

Mabel said at once, "It's not at all extraordinary. It would be with any one else; but not with James."

Lucy lifted her head. "What do you mean, Mabel?"

"Well, it's difficult to explain. You are so odd about James. He is either the sort of being you name in a whisper—or makes you edgy all over—like a slate-pencil. But James—I dare say you haven't noticed it: you think he's a clever man, and so he may be; but really he has never grown up."

Lucy's foot began to rock. "My dear girl, really—"

"Oh, I know. I know. Of course you're annoyed, especially after such a queer experience. We won't discuss it—it will be useless. But that's my opinion, you know. I think that he was completely successful, according to his own ideas." The battle raged; I need not add that the mystery, far from being undiscussed, was driven up and down the field of possibility till a late hour; nor that Mabel held to her position, in high disparagement, as Lucy felt, of Lancelot, deeply involved.

An upshot, and a shrewd one, was Mabel's abrupt, "Well, what are you going to do now? I mean, supposing he does it again?"

Lucy mused. "I don't somehow think he will, for a long time." She added naïvely, "I wish he would. I like it."

Mabel understood her. "You mean that you like him for doing it." And dreamy Lucy nodded. "Yes, that's exactly what I mean. I do, awfully."

Mabel here kissed Lucy. "Dearest, you're wonderfully sweet. You would love anybody who loved you."

"I don't think I would," Lucy said, "but I should certainly have loved James more if he had ever seemed to love me. And I can't possibly doubt that he did that day that Lancelot went back. What bothers me is that he stopped there." And so, to it again, in the manner of women, tireless in speculation about what is not to be understood.

James, restored in tone, was affable, and even considerate, in the morning. Mabel, studying him with new eyes, had to admire his flawless surface, though her conviction of the shallow depth of him was firmler rooted than before. "He is—he really is—a tremendous donkey, poor James," she thought to herself as he gave out playful sarcasms at her expense, and was incisive without loss of urbanity. Mabel was urgent with her sister to join the party at Peltry when Urquhart was there. "I do wish you would. He's rather afraid of you, I think, and that will throw him upon me—which is what is wanted." That was how she put it.

James, quite the secure, backed her up. "I should go if I were you," he said to Lucy from behind the *Morning Post*. "It will do you a great deal of good. You always choose February to moult in, and you will have to be feathered down there. Besides, it's evident you can be useful to Mabel." Lucy went so far as to get out her engagement book, and to turn up the date, not very seriously. What she found confirmed her. "I can't," she said; "it's out of the question."

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"Why, what is happening?" Mabel must know.

"It's an Opera night," said Lucy. "The *Walküre* is happening."

"Oh, are they? H'm. Yes, I suppose I can't expect you."

Lucy was scornfully clear. "I should think not indeed. Not for a wilderness of Urquharts!"

"Not all the peltry of Siberia—" said James, rather sharply, as he thought; and dismissed the subject in favour of his own neatly-spatted foot. "Wagner!" he said. "I am free to confess that, apart from the glory of the thing, I had rather—"

"Marry one of Mr. Urquhart's wives," said the hardy Mabel.

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"Two," said James, quite ready for her.

Mabel rattled away to her Essex and left her sister all the better for the astringent she had imparted. Lucy did not agree with her by any means; it made her hot with annoyance to realise that anybody could so think of James. At the same time she felt that she must steady herself. After all, a man might kiss his wife if he pleased, and he might do it how he pleased. It was undignified to speculate about it. She tried very hard to drive that home to herself, and she did succeed in imposing it upon her conduct. But she was not convinced. She was too deeply romantic for conviction by any such specious reasoning. That affair in the dark had been the real thing; it implied—oh, everything. Let come what might, let be what was, that was the true truth of the mystery. And to be loved like that was—oh, everything!

But she dismissed it from her thoughts with an effort of will, and relations with James resumed their old position. They became formal, they were tinged now and again with the old asperity; they were rather dreary. Lancelot's star rose as James's sank in the heavens. His letters became her chief preoccupation. But James's star, fallen low though it were, still showed a faint hue of rose-colour.

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Some little time after this—somewhere in early February, she met Urquhart at a luncheon party, and was glad to see him. He shook hands in his usual detached way, as if her gladness and their acquaintance were matters of course. He sat next to her without ceremony, removing another man's name-card for the purpose, and after a few short, snapped phrases about anything or nothing, they drifted into easy talk. Lucy's simplicity made her a delightful companion, when she was sure of her footing. She told him that she had been saving up Lancelot's letter to show him. "Good," he said. "I want it."

But it was not here, as it happened. So she wrote out from memory the sentence about Urquhart: the polligamous pirate, with wives &c. "Aren't you flattered?" she asked him, radiant with mirthful malice. He frowned approval. He was pleased, but, like all those who make laughter, he had none of his own. "That shot told. I got him with the first barrel. Trust a boy to love a law-breaker. He'll never forget me that. He's my friend for life." He added, as if to himself, "Hope so, anyhow."

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Lucy at this, had she been a cat, would have purred and kneaded the carpet. As it was, her contentment emboldened her to flights. She was much more bird than cat. "I wonder if you are really a law-breaker," she said. "I don't think I should be surprised to know it of you."

He frowned again. "No, I should say that the ground had been prepared for that. You wouldn't be surprised—but would you be disturbed? That's what I want to know before I tell you."

This had to be considered. What did she in her private mind think of law-breakers? One thing was quite clear to her. Whatever she might think of them, she was not prepared to tell him.

"I'm a lawyer's wife, you know."

"That tells me nothing," he said. "That would only give you the position of an expert. It doesn't commit you to a line. I'll tell you this—it may encourage you to a similar confidence. If I wanted to break a law very badly, I shouldn't do it on reflection perhaps; but I could never resist a sudden impulse. If somebody told me that it would be desirable in all sorts of ways to break a man's head I shouldn't do it, because I should be bothering myself with all the possibilities of the thing—how desirable it might be, or how undesirable. But if, happening to be in his company, I saw his head in a breakable aspect—splish! I should land him a nasty one. That's a certainty. Now, what should you say to that? It happens that I want to know." It was evident to her that he really did.

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Lucy gave him one of her kind, compassionate looks, which always made her seem beautiful, and said, "I should forgive you. I should tell you that you were too young for your years; but I should forgive you, I'm sure."

"That's what I wanted to know," said Urquhart, and remained silent for a while. When he resumed it was abruptly, on a totally new matter. "I shall bring my sister over to you after this. She's here. I don't know whether you'll like her. She'll like you."

"Where is she?" Lucy asked, rather curious.

"She's over there, by our hostess. That big black hat is hers. She's underneath it." Lucy saw a spry, black-haired youngish woman, very vivacious but what she herself called "good." James would have said, "Smart." Not at all like her brother, she thought, and said so. "She's not such a scoundrel," Urquhart admitted, "but she takes a line of her own. Her husband's name is Nugent. He is South Irish, where we are North. That boy who went with us to the play is her son. He is a lively breed—so it hasn't turned out amiss. She's not at all your sort, but as you know the worst of us you may as well know what we can do when we exert ourselves." He added, "My old father, now with Beelzebub, was a terror."

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"Do tell me about him."

"It would take too long. He was very old-fashioned in most ways. They used to call him King Urquhart in Donegal. The worst of it was that he knew good claret and could shoot. That makes a bad combination. He used to sit on a hogshead of it in his front yard and challenge all and sundry to mortal combat. He really did. Duels he used to call them. He said, 'Me honour's involved, d'ye see?' and believed it. But they were really murders, because he was infallible with a revolver. He adored my mother, but she couldn't do anything with him. 'Tush, me dear,' he used to say, 'I wouldn't hurt a hair of his bald head.' And then he'd have to bolt over to France for a bit and keep quiet. But everybody liked him, I'm sorry to say. They gave him a public funeral when he died. They took him out of the hearse—imagine the great sooty plumes of it—and carried him to the chapel—half a mile away." Lucy didn't know how much of this to believe, which made it none the worse.

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"He was a Catholic?"

"He was."

"And so are you?"

He looked up. "Eh? I suppose I am—if any."

"What *do* you mean?" she insisted.

"Well," he said. "It's there, I expect. You don't get rid of it." She considered this to herself.

Mrs. Nugent—the Honourable Mrs. Nugent, as it afterwards appeared—made herself very amiable. "We both like boys," she said, "which makes everything easy. I hope you liked my Pat—you met him, I know. Yours seems to be an unconscious humourist. Jimmy is always chuckling over him. Mine takes after the Urquharts; rather grim, but quite sound when you know them. My husband is really Irish. He might say 'Begorra' at any minute. The Urquharts are a mixed lot. Jimmy says we're Eurasians when he's cross with us—which means with himself. I suppose we were border thieves once, like the Turnbells and Pringles. But James I planted us in Ireland, and there have been James Urquharts ever since. I don't know why that seems satisfactory, but it does."

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"I saw what Jimmy was saying, you know," she said presently. "He began upon me, and then slid off to our deplorable father. An inexhaustible subject to Jimmy, who really admires that kind of thing."

Lucy smilingly deprecated the criticism.

"Oh, but he does. If he could be like that, he would be. But he wants two qualities—he can't laugh, and he can't cry. Father could only laugh internally. He used to get crimson, and swallow hard. That was his way. Jimmy can't laugh at all, that's the mischief of it. And crying too. Father could cry rivers. One of the best things I remember of him was his crying before Mother. 'Damn it all, Meg, I missed him!' he said, choking with grief. Mother knew exactly what to say. 'You'll get him next time, Jimmy. Come and change your stockings now.' Well, *our* Jimmy couldn't do that. To begin with, of course, he wouldn't have 'missed him.'"

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"No," said Lucy, reflecting, "I don't think he would miss—unless he was in too much of a hurry to hit."

Mrs. Nugent looked quickly at her. "That is very clever of you. You have touched on his great difference from Father. He is awfully impatient."

All this did Lucy a great deal of good. James thought that she had better call on Mrs. Nugent. He knew all about her.

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CHAPTER VIII

AGAIN

The second time was in late February, at the Opera: the *Walküre*, of all operas in the world, where passion of the suddenest is seen on its most radiant spring morning. James, who was dreadfully bored by Wagner, and only went because it was the thing to do, and truly also because "a man must be seen with his wife," could not promise to be there, dressed, at such an unearthly hour as half-past six—James, I say, did not go with her, but vowed to be there "long before seven." That he undertook. So she went alone, and sat, as she always did, half hidden behind the curtain of her box on the second tier.

The place was flooded with dark. The great wonder began—the amazing prelude with its brooding, its surmisals, its storms, its pounding hooves remorselessly pursuing, and flashes of the horn, like the blare of lightning. She surrendered herself, and as the curtain rose settled down to drink with the eyes as well as with the ears; for she was no musician, and could only be deeply moved by this when she saw and heard. It immediately absorbed her; the music "of preparation and suspense" seemed to turn her bones to liquor—and at this moment she again felt herself possessed by man's love: the strong hand over her heart, the passion of his hold, the intoxication of the kiss. To the accompaniment of shrill and wounded violins she yielded herself to this miracle of the dark. She seemed to hear in a sharp whisper, "You darling!" She half turned, she half swooned again, she drank, and she gave to drink. The music speared up to the heights of bliss, then subsided as she held on her relaxed. When she stretched out her hand for her lover's, he was not near her. She was alone. The swift and poignant little drama may have lasted a minute; but like a dream it had the suggestion of infinity about it, transcending time as it defied place. Confused, bemused, she turned her attention to the stage, determined to compose herself at all cost. She sat very still, and shivered; she gave all her powers to her mind, and succeeded by main effort. Insensibly the great drama doing down there resumed its hold; and it was even with a slight shock that she became aware by and by of James sitting sedately by her, with the eyeglass sharply set for diversion anywhere but on the scene. Again she remembered with secret amusement that she had not been conscious of the eyeglass when—for reasons of his own—he had paid his mysterious homage to love and her.

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She kept a firm grip of herself: she would not move an inch towards him. She could never do that again. But she passed him over the play-bill, and lifted the glasses to show him where they were. She saw the eyeglass dip as he nodded his thanks, and heard him whisper as he passed back the bill, "No good. Dark as the grave." Oh, extraordinary James! She suffered hysterical laughter, but persisted against it, and succeeded.

When the lights went up she afforded herself a gay welcome of him, from gleaming, happy and conscious eyes. He met it blandly, smiled awry and said, "You love it?"

"Oh," she sighed, meaning all that she dared not say, "how I love it!"

James said, "Bravo. I was very punctual, you'll admit." That very nearly overcame her. But all she said was, "I didn't hear you come in—or go out."

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James looked very vague at that. He was on the point of frowning over it, but gave it up. It was a Lucyism. He rose and touched his coat-collar, to feel that it gripped where it should. "Let's see who's in the house," he said, and searched the boxes. "Royalty, as usual! That's what I call devotion. Who's that woman in a snow-leopard? Oh, yes, of course. Hullo. I say, my child, will you excuse me? I've just seen some people I ought to see. There's lots of time—and I won't be late." And he was off. A very remarkable lover indeed was James.

Mrs. Nugent waved her hand across the parterre. Francis Lingen knocked and entered. She could afford that; and presently a couple added themselves, young married people whom she liked for their poverty, hopefulness and unaffected pleasure in each other. She made Lingen acquainted with them, and talked to young Mr. Pierson. He spoke with a cheer in his voice. "Ripping opera. Madge adores it. We saw your husband downstairs, but I don't think he knew us."... And through her head blew the words like a searching wind: "You darling! You darling!" Oh, that was great love! Small wonder that James saw nothing of the Piersons. And yet—ah, she must give up speculating and judging. That had undone poor Psyche. Young Mr. Pierson chattered away about Madge and Wagner, both ripping; James returned, bland, positive, dazzling the man of exclusive clubs; was reminded of young Mrs. Pierson, with whom he shook hands, of young Mr. Pierson, to whom he nodded and said "Ha!" and finally of Francis Lingen. "Ha, Lingen, you here!" Francis shivered. That seemed to him to ring a knell. Since when had he been Lingen to James. Since this moment. Now why had James cold-shouldered him? Was it possible that he had noticed too much devotion?... And if he had, was it not certain that she must have noticed it? He stopped midway of the stairs, and passers-by may have thought he was looking for a dropt sixpence. Not at all. The earth seemed to be heaving beneath his feet. But a wave of courage surged up through him. Pooh! no woman yet ever disregarded the homage of a man. He would send some roses to-morrow, without a card. She would understand. And so it went on. Wagner came back to his own.

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On this occasion, after this second great adventure, Lucy had no conflict with fate. Thankfully she took the gift of the God; she took it as final, as a thing complete in itself, a thing most beautiful, most touching, most honourable to giver and recipient. It revived all her warmth of feeling, but

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this time without a bitter lees to the dram. And she was immensely the better for it. She felt in charity with all the world, her attitude to James was one of clear sight. Oh, now she understood him through and through. She would await the fulness of time; sufficient for the day was the light of the day.

She was happier than she had been for many years. Half-term was approaching, when she would be allowed to go down and see Lancelot; in these days she felt Spring in the air. February can be kind to us, and show a golden threshold to March. She had a letter from Mabel telling her of Mr. Urquhart's feats in the hunting field.... "He's quite mad, I think, and mostly talks about you and Lancelot. He calls you Proserpine. As for his riding, my dear, it curdles the blood. He doesn't ride, he drives; sits well back, and accelerates on the near side. He brought his own horses, luckily for ours and his neck. They seem to understand it. He hunted every day but one; and then he rushed up to town to keep some appointment and came back to a very late dinner, driving himself in his motor. He is a tempestuous person, but can be very grave when he likes. He talked beautifully one evening—mostly about you." Lucy's eyes smiled wisely over this letter. She liked to think that she could induce gravity upon a hunting party. She had never quite approved of the Peltry atmosphere. Hard riding seemed to involve hard living, and hard swearing. She had once heard Laurence let himself go to some rider over hounds, and had put him on a back shelf in her mind—him and his Peltry with him. A prude? No, she was sure she was nothing of the sort; but she liked people to keep a hold on themselves.

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A gay little dinner-party, one of hers, as she told James, finished a month of high light. The young Pierson couple, some Warreners, a Mrs. Treveer and Jimmy Urquhart—eight with themselves. The faithful Francis Lingen was left out as a concession to James and love in the dark. She noticed, with quiet amusement, how gratified James was. He was so gratified that he did not even remark upon it. Now James's little weakness, or one of them, let us say, was that he could not resist a cutting phrase, when the thing did not matter. Therefore—she reasoned—Francis Lingen, absurdly enough, did matter. That he should, that anything of the sort should matter to James was one more sign to her of the promise, just as the weather was one. The Spring was at hand, and soon we should all go a-maying.

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So we dined at one table, and had a blaze of daffodils from Wycross, and everybody seemed to talk at once. Pierson told her after dinner that Madge thought Urquhart ripping (as she had thought Wagner); and certainly he was one to make a dinner-party go. He was ridiculous about Laurence Corbet and his sacred foxes. "Don't *shoot* that thing! God of Heaven, what are you about?" "Oh, I beg your pardon, I thought—" "Are you out of your senses? That must be torn to pieces by dogs." He was very good at simulating savagery, but had a favourite trick of dropping it suddenly, or turning it on himself. He caught Mrs. Treveer, a lady of ardour not tempered by insight. She agreed with him about hunting. "Oh, you are so right! Now can't something be done about it? Couldn't a little paper be written—in that vein, you know?" "Not by me," said Urquhart. "I'm a hunting man, you see." Mrs. Treveer held up her fan, but took no offence.

Lucy, with Mabel's letter in mind, gave her guest some attention; but for the life of her could not see that he paid her any beyond what he had for the others or for his dinner. He joined Pierson at her side, and made no effort to oust him. He did not flatter her by recalling Lancelot; he seemed rather to muse out loud. James with his coat-tails to the fire was quite at his ease—and when Urquhart offered to drive her down to Westgate for the half-term (which she herself mentioned), it was James who said, "Capital! That will be jolly for you." "But *you* wouldn't come, would you?" "My child, it is that I *couldn't* come. A motor in March! I should die. Besides," he added, "as you know, I have to be at Brighton that Sunday." She had known it, and she had known also that Brighton was an excuse. One of the bogies she kept locked in a cupboard was James's *ennui* when Lancelot was to the fore. Could this too be jealousy!

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"I'll tell you what I'll do," Jimmy Urquhart said. "The run down would be rather jolly, but the run back in the dark might be a bore. The Nugents have got a house at Sandwich. Why shouldn't you go there? You know my sister Nugent, as they used to say."

"Yes, of course I do," Lucy said, "but I couldn't really—"

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"But she is there, my dear ma'am. That's the point. I'll drop you there on my way back. I wish I could stop too, but that's not possible. She'll arrange it."

James thought it an excellent plan; but Lucy had qualms. Odd, that the visit of Eros should a second time be succeeded by a motor-jaunt! To go motoring, again, with a Mr. Urquhart—oh! But she owned that she was absurd. James did not conceal his sarcasms. "She either fears her fate too much..." he quoted at her. She pleaded with him.

"Darling," she said—and he was immensely complacent over that—"I suppose it's a sign of old age, but— After all, why shouldn't I go by train—or in our own car, if it comes to that?"

"Firstly," said James through his eyeglass, "because Urquhart asks you to go in his—a terror that destroyeth in the noonday compared to ours; and secondly because, if you don't want it, I should rather like to go to Brighton in mine."

"Oh," said she, "then you don't mind motoring in March!"

"Not in a closed car," said James—"and not to Brighton." This acted as an extinguisher of the warmer feelings. Let Mr. Urquhart do his worst then.

CHAPTER IX

SUNDRY ROMANTIC EPISODES

A little cloud of witness, assembled at will like seagulls out of the blue inane, would come about her in after years. That madly exhilarating rush to Westgate, for instance, on a keen March morning; and that sudden question of hers to Urquhart, "What made you think of asking me?" And his laconic answer, given without a turn of the head, "Because I knew you would like it. You did before, you know. And that was January." There was one. Another, connected with it, was her going alone up to the schoolhouse, and her flush of pleasure when Lancelot said, "Oh, I say, did He bring you down? Good—then we'll go immediately and see the car; perhaps it's a new one." She could afford to recall that—after a long interval. They had had a roaring day, "all over the place," as Lancelot said afterwards to a friend; and then there had been her parting with Urquhart in the dark at the open door of Queendon Court. "Aren't you going to stop?" "No, my dear." She remembered being amused with that. "Aren't you even coming in?" "I am not. Good-bye. You enjoyed yourself?" "Oh, immensely." "That's what I like," he had said, and "pushed off," as his own phrase went. Atop of that, the return to James, and to nothingness. For nothing happened, except that he had been in a good temper throughout, which may easily have been because she had been in one herself—until the Easter holidays, when he had been very cross indeed. Poor James, to get him to begin to understand Lancelot's bluntness, intensity, and passion for something or other, did seem hopeless.

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They were at Wycross, on her urgent entreaty, and James was bored at Wycross, she sometimes thought, because she loved it so much. Jealousy. A man's wife ought to devote herself. She should love nothing but her husband. He had spent his days at the golf course, not coming home to lunch. Urquhart was asked for a Sunday—on Lancelot's account—but couldn't come, or said so at least. Then, on the Saturday, when he should have been there, James suddenly kissed her in the garden—and, of course, in the dark.

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She hadn't known that he was in the house yet. He had contracted the habit of having tea at the club-house and talking on till dark. He did that, as she believed, because she always read to Lancelot in the evenings: she gave up the holidays entirely to him. Well, Lancelot that afternoon had been otherwise engaged—with friends of a neighbour. She had cried off on the score of "seeing something of Father," at which Lancelot had winked. But James was not in to tea, and at six—and no sign of him—she yielded to the liquid calling of a thrush in the thickening lilacs, and had gone out. There she stayed till it was dark, in a favourite place—a circular garden of her contriving, with a pond, and a golden privet hedge, so arranged as to throw yellow reflections in the water. Standing there, it grew perfectly dark—deeply and softly dark. The night had come down warm and wet, like manifold blue-black gauze. She heard his quick, light step. Her heart hammered, but she did not move. He came behind her, clasped and held her close. "Oh, you've come—I wondered. Oh, how sweet, how sweet—" And then "My love!" had been said, and she had been kissed. In a moment he was gone. She had stayed on motionless, enthralled by the beauty of the act—and when she had withdrawn herself at last, and had tiptoed to the house, she saw his lamp on the table, and himself reading the *Spectator* before a wood fire! Recalling all that, she remembered the happy little breath of laughter which had caught her. "If it wasn't so perfectly sweet and beautiful, it would be the most comic thing in the world!" she had said to herself.

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A telegram from Jimmy Urquhart came that night just before dinner. "Arriving to-morrow say ten-thirty for an hour or so, Urquhart." It was sent from St. James's Street. Lancelot had said, "Stout fellow," and James took it quite well. She herself remembered her feeling of annoyance, how clearly she foresaw an interrupted reverie and a hampered Sunday—and also how easily he had falsified her prevision. There had been an animated morning of garden inspection, in the course of which she had shown him (with a softly fluttering heart and perhaps enhanced colour) the hedged oval of last night's romance; a pony race; a game of single cricket in the paddock—Lancelot badly beaten; lunch, and great debate with James about aeroplanes, wherein Lancelot showed himself a bitter and unscrupulous adversary of his parent. Finally, the trial of the new car: an engine of destruction such as Lancelot had never dreamed of. It was admittedly too high-powered for England; you were across the county in about a minute. And then he had departed in a kind of thunderstorm of his own making. Lancelot, preternaturally moved, said to his mother, "I say, Mamma, what a man—eh?" She, lightly, "Yes, isn't he wonderful?" and Lancelot, with a snort: "A man? Ten rather small men—easily." And James, poor James, saw nothing kissable in that!

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It hadn't been till May of that year that Lucy began to think about Urquhart—or rather it was in May that she discovered herself to be thinking about him. Mabel assisted her there. Mabel was in Cadogan Square for the season, and the sisters saw much of each other. Now it happened that one day Mabel had seen Lucy with Urquhart walking down Bond Street, at noon or thereabouts, and had passed by on the other side with no more than a wave of the hand. It was all much simpler than it looked, really, because Lucy had been to James's office, which was in Cork Street, and coming away had met Jimmy Urquhart in Burlington Gardens. He had strolled on with her, and was telling her that he had been waterplaning on Chichester Harbour and was getting rather bitten with the whole business of flight. "I'm too old, I know, but I'm still ass enough to take risks. I think I shall get the ticket," he had said. What ticket? The pilot's ticket, or whatever they might

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call it. "I expect you are too old," she had said, and then— "How old are you, by the way?" He told her. "We call it forty-two." "Exactly James's age; and exactly ten years older than me. Yes, too old. I think I wouldn't."

He had laughed. "I'm certain I shall. It appeals to me." Then he had told her, "The first time I saw a man flying I assure you I could have shed tears." She remembered that this was out of his power. "Odd thing! What's gravitation to me, or I to gravitation? A commonplace whereby I walk the world. Never mind. There was that young man breaking a law of this planet. Well—that's a miracle. I tell you I might have wept. And then I said to myself, "My man, you'll do this or perish." Then she: "And have you done it?" and he: "I have not, but I'm going to." She had suddenly said, "No, please don't." His quick look at her she remembered, and the suffusion on his burnt face. "Oh, but I shall. Do you wish to know why? Because you don't mean it; because you wouldn't like me if I obeyed you." She said gravely, "You can't know that." "Yes, but I do. You like me—assume that—" Lucy said, "You may"; and he, "I do. You like me because I am such as I am. If I obeyed you in this I should cease to be such as I am and become such as I am not and never have been. You might like me more—but you might not. No, that's too much of a risk. I can't afford it." She had said, "That's absurd," but she hadn't thought it so.

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Mabel came to her for lunch and rallied her. "I saw you, my dear. But I wouldn't spoil sport. All right—you might do much worse. He's very much alive. Anyhow, he doesn't wear an—" Then Lucy was hurt. "Oh, Mabel, that's horrid. You know I hate you to talk like that." Mabel stood rebuked. "It was beastly of me. But you know I never could stand his eyeglass. It is what they call anti-social in their novels. Really, you might as well live in the Crystal Palace." Then she held out her hand, and Lucy took it after some hesitation. But Mabel was irrepressible. Almost immediately she had jumped into the fray again, with "You're both going to his place in Hampshire, aren't you?" Then Lucy had flushed; and Mabel had given her a queer look.

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"That's all right," she presently said. "He asked us, you know, but we can't. I hear that Vera Nugent is to be hostess. I rather liked her, though of course you can never tell how such copious conversation will wear. I don't think she stopped talking for a single moment. Laurence thought he was going mad. It makes him broody, you know, like a hen. He rubs his ears, and says his wattles are inflamed."

It was either that day, or another such day—it really doesn't matter which day it was—that Mabel drifted into the subject of what she called "the James romance." Did James—? Had James—? And where were we standing now? Lucy, whose feelings upon the subject were more complicated than they had been at first, was not very communicative; but she owned there had been repetitions. Mabel, who was desperately quick to notice, judged that she was mildly bored. "I see," she said; "I see. But—that's all."

"All!" cried Lucy. "Yes, indeed."

Mabel said again, "I see." Lucy, who certainly didn't see, was silent; and then Mabel with appalling candour said, "I suppose you would have it out with him if you weren't afraid to."

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Lucy was able to cope with that kind of thing. "Nothing would induce me to do it. I shouldn't be able to lift my head up if I did. It would not only be—well, horrible, but it would be very cruel as well. I should feel myself a brute." On Mabel's shrug she was stung into an attack of her own. "And whatever you may say, to me, I know that you couldn't bring yourself to such a point. No woman could do it, who respected herself." Mabel had the worst of it in the centre, but by a flanking movement recovered most of the ground. She became very vague. She said, as if to herself, "After all, you know, you may be mistaken. Perhaps the less you say the better."

Mistaken! And "the less you say"! Lucy's grey eyes took intense direction. "Please tell me what you mean, my dear. Do you think I'm out of my senses? Do you really think I've imagined it all?"

"No, no," said Mabel quickly, and visibly disturbed. "No, no, of course I don't. I really don't know what I meant. It's all too confusing for simple people like you and me. Let's talk about something else." Lucy, to whom the matter was distasteful, agreed; but the thought persisted. Mistaken ... and "the less you say...!"

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CHAPTER X

AT A WORLD'S EDGE

It was after that queer look, after her too conscious blush that she began to envisage the state of her affairs. She was going to Martley Thicket for Whitsuntide; it was an old engagement, comparatively old, that is; she did want to go, and now she knew that she did. Well, how much did she want to go? Ought she to want it? What had happened?

Questions thronged her when once she had opened a window. What did it matter to her whether Urquhart qualified as an aviator or not? What had made her ask him not to do it? How had she allowed him to say "Assume that you like me"? The short dialogue stared at her in red letters upon the dark. "Assume that you like me—" "You may assume it." "I do." She read the packed little sentences over and over, and studied herself with care. No, honestly, nothing jarred. There

was no harm; she didn't feel any tarnish upon her. And yet—she was looking forward to Martley Thicket with a livelier blood than she had felt since Easter when James had kissed her in the shrouded garden. A livelier blood? Hazarding the looking-glass, she thought that she could detect a livelier iris too. What had happened? Well, of course, the answer to that question was involved in another: how much was she to assume? How much did Urquhart like her? She hoped, against conviction, that she might have answered these questions before she met him again—which would probably be at Martley. Just now, stoutly bearing her disapproval, he was doubtless at Byfleet or elsewhere risking his neck. She answered a question possibly arising out of this by a shrewd smile. "Of course I don't disapprove. He knows that. I shiver; but I know he's perfectly right. He may be sure." The meeting at Martley would, at the very least, be extremely interesting. She left it there for the moment. [Pg 122]

But having once begun to pay attention to such matters as these, she pursued her researches—in and out of season. It was a busy time of year, and James always laid great stress on what he called "the duties of her station." She must edge up crowded stairways behind him, stand at his side in hot and humming rooms where the head spun with the effort not to hear what other people were saying—so much more important, always, than what your partner was. James's height and eyeglass seemed to give him an impartial air at these dreadful ceremonies. Behind his glass disk he could afford to be impertinent. And he was certainly rude enough to be an Under-Secretary. Without that shining buckler of the soul he would have been simply nobody; with it, he was a demi-god. Here then, under the very shadow of his immortality, Lucy pursued her researches. What of the romantic, hidden, eponymous James? Where did he stand now in her regard? [Pg 123]

Since Easter at Wycross, James had not been her veiled Eros, but the possibilities were all there. He was not a garden god, by any means, nor a genius of the Spring. January and Onslow Square had not frozen his currents; February and the Opera House had heightened his passion. At any moment he might resume his devotional habit—even here in Carlton House Terrace. And what then? Well—and this was odd—this ought to have produced a state of tension very trying to the nerves; and, well—it hadn't. That's all. At that very party in Carlton House Terrace, with a band braying under the stairs, and a fat lord shouting in her ear, her secret soul was trembling on a brink. She was finding out to her half-rueful dismay—it was only half—that she was prepared to be touched, prepared to be greatly impressed, but not prepared to be thrilled as she had been, if James should kiss her again. She was prepared, in fact, to present—as statesmen do when they write to their sovereign—her grateful, humble duty—and no more. In vain the band brayed, in vain Lord J—, crimson by her ear, roared about the weather in the West of Ireland, Lucy's soul was peering over the edge of her old world into the stretches of a misty new one. [Pg 124]

This was bad enough, and occupied her through busy nights and days; but there was more disturbing matter to come, stirred up to cloud her mind by Mabel's unwonted discretion. Mabel had been more than discreet. She had been frightened. Pushing out into a stream of new surmise, she had suddenly faltered and hooked at the quay. Lucy herself was at first merely curious. She had no doubts, certainly no fears. What had been the matter with Mabel, when she hinted that perhaps, after all, James had never done anything? What could Mabel know, or guess, or suspect? Lucy owned to herself, candidly, that James was incomprehensible. After thirteen years, or was it fourteen?—suddenly—with no warning symptoms, to plunge into such devotion as never before, when everything had been new, and he only engaged—! Men were like that when they were engaged. They aren't certain of one, and leave no chances. But James, even as an engaged man, had always been certain. He had taken her, and everything else, for granted. She remembered how her sisters, not only Mabel, but the critical Agnes (now Mrs. Riddell in the North), had discussed him and found him too cocksure to be quite gallant. Kissed her? Of course he had kissed her. Good Heavens. Yes, but not as he had that night at the Opera. "You darling! You darling!" Now James had called her "my darling" as often as you please—but never until then "you darling." There's a world of difference. Anybody can see it. [Pg 125]

And then—after the beautiful, the thrilling, the deeply touching episode—the moment after it—there was the old, indifferent, slightly bored James with the screwed eye and the disk. Not a hint, not a ripple, not the remains of a flush. It was the most bewildering, the most baffling jig-saw of a business she had ever heard of. You would have said that he was two quite separate people; you might have said—Mabel would have said at once—that James had had nothing to do with it. [Pg 126]

But she *had* said so! The discovery stabbed Lucy in the eyes like a flash of lightning, left her blind and quivering, with a swim of red before her hurt vision. That was why Mabel had been frightened. And now Lucy herself was frightened.

Francis Lingen, absurd! Mr. Urquhart? Ah, that was quite another thing. She grew hot, she grew quite cold, and suddenly she began to sob. Oh, no, no, not that. A flood of tossing thoughts came rioting and racing in, flinging crests of foam, like white and beaten water. She for a time was swept about, a weed in this fury of storm. She was lost, effortless, at death's threshold. But she awoke herself from the nightmare, walked herself about, and reason returned. It was nonsense, unwholesome nonsense. Why, that first time, he was in the library with James and Francis Lingen, his second visit to the house! Why, when she was at the Opera he had been at Peltry with the Mabels. And as for Wycross, he had wired from St. James's in the afternoon, and come on the next day. Absurd—and thank God for it. And poor Francis Lingen! She could afford to laugh at that. Francis Lingen was as capable of kissing the Duchess of Westbury—at whose horrible party she had been the other night—as herself. [Pg 127]

She felt very safe, and enormously relieved. So much so that she could afford herself the reflection that if hardihood had been all that was wanting, Jimmy Urquhart would have had plenty and to spare. Oh, yes, indeed. But—thank God again—he was a gentleman if ever there was one. Nobody but a gentleman could afford to be so simple in dealing.

Having worked all this out, she felt that her feet at least were on solid ground. A spirit of adventure was renewed in her, and a rather unfortunate *contretemps* provoked it. Before she knew where she was, she was up to the neck, as Urquhart would have said, in a turbid stream.

Francis Lingen, that elegant unfortunate, was certainly responsible, if you could call one so tentative and clinging responsible for anything. He had proposed the Flower Show, to which she had been, as an earnest gardener, early in the morning, by herself, with a note-book. She did not want to go with him at all; and moreover she had an appointment to meet James at a wedding affair in Queen's Gate. However, being ridiculously amiable where the pale-haired hectic was concerned, go she did, and sat about at considerable length. He had only cared to look at the sweet-peas, his passion of the hour, and urged a chair upon her that he might the better do what he really liked, look at her and talk about himself. So he did, and read her a poem, and made great play with his tenderness, his dependence upon her judgment and his crosses with the world. He pleaded for tea, which, ordered, did not come; then hunted for the motor, which finally she found for herself. She arrived late at Queen's Gate; the eyeglass glared in horror. James, indeed, was very cross. What any chance victim of his neighbourhood may have endured is not to be known. So far as Lucy could see he did not open his mouth once while he was there. He refused all nourishment with an angry gleam, and seemed wholly bent upon making her self-conscious, uncomfortable and, finally, indignant. Upon this goodly foundation he reared his mountain of affront.

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He made himself a monument of matter-of-fact impassivity during the drive home. His arms were folded, he stared out of window; she thought once she heard him humming an air. But he didn't smoke, as he certainly would have done had relations been easy. He kept her at a distance, but not aggressively.

Lucy was by this time very much annoyed. Her apologies had been frozen at the front by his angry glare. She had no intention now of renewing them, nor did she care to justify herself, as she might have done, by pointing out that, while she was half-an-hour late, he was probably a quarter of an hour too early. This would have been a safe venture, for his fussiness over an appointment and tendency to be beforehand with it were quite well known to himself. She kept the best face she could upon the miserable affair, but was determined that she would force a crisis at home, come what might.

Arrived at Onslow Square, James strode into the library and shut the door behind him. When Crewdson was disposed of on his numerous affairs, Lucy followed her lord. He turned, he stared, and waited for her to speak.

Lucy said, "I think that you must be sorry that you have treated me so. I feel it very much, and must ask you how you justify it."

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James did his best to an easy calm. "Apologies should be in the air. I should have looked for one myself an hour or so ago."

"You should have had it," she said, "if you had given me time. But you stared me out of countenance the moment I came in. Anger before you had even heard me is not a nice thing to face."

James turned pale. He used his most incisive tones. "I am ready to hear your explanation. Perhaps I had better say that I know it."

Lucy showed him angry eyes. "If you know it, there is no need for me to trouble you with it. You must also know that it isn't easy to get away from a great crowd in a minute."

But he seemed not to hear her. He had another whip in waiting, which nothing could have kept him from the use of. "I think that I must trouble you, rather. I think I should be relieved by hearing from you where the crowd was of which you were one—or two, indeed."

She discovered that he was white with rage, though she had never seen him so before. "What do you mean, James?" she said—and he, "I know that you were at the Flower Show. You were there with Lingen."

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"Yes," said Lucy, "I was indeed. And why shouldn't I be?"

"I have told you before this what my views are about that. I don't intend to repeat them, at present."

"I think you must be mad," said Lucy. "Do you mean to tell me that you object to Francis Lingen to that extent—to the extent of such a scene as this?"

He faced her from his height. "I do mean that."

"Then," she said, out of herself, "you are insulting me. I don't think you can intend to do that. And I should like to say also that you, of all the men in the world, are the last person to be jealous or suspicious of anybody where I am concerned."

She hadn't meant to say that; but when she saw that he took it as a commonplace of marital ethics, she determined to go further still.

He took it, in fact, just so. It seemed to him what any wife would say to any indignant husband. "I beg your pardon," he said, "you don't quite follow me. I agree with you that I should be the last person; but I beg to point out to you that I should also be the first person. And I will go on to add, if you will excuse me, that I should be the only person."

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"No person at all," said Lucy, "has the right or the reason to suspect me of anything, or to be jealous of any of my acquaintance. You didn't understand me: I suppose because you are too angry. What I meant you to remember was how much, how very much, you are bound to believe in me—now of all times in our life."

Here then was a Psyche with the lamp in her hand. Here was Lucy on the limit of a world unknown. Here she stood, at her feet the tufted grasses and field herbs, dusty, homely, friendly things, which she knew. Beyond her, beyond the cliff's edge were the dim leagues of a land and sea unknown. What lay out there beyond her in the mist? What mountain and forest land lay there, what quiet islands, what sounding mains?

But it was done now. James gazed blankly, but angrily, puzzled into her face.

"I haven't the faintest notion what you mean," he said. Evidently he had not.

She must go on, though she hated it. "You are very surprising. I can hardly think you are serious. Let me remind you of the opera—of the *Walküre*."

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He gave his mind to it, explored the past, and so entirely failed to understand her that he looked rather foolish. "I remember that we were there." Then he had a flash of light—and shed it on her, God knows. "I remember also that Lingen was in the box."

"Oh, Lingen! Are you mad on—? Do you not remember that you were there before Lingen?"

"Yes, I do remember it." He stood, poor fool, revealed. Lucy's voice rang clear.

"Very well. If that is all that your memory brings you, I have nothing more to say."

She left him swiftly, and went upstairs in the possession of an astounding truth, but rapt with it in such a whirlwind of wonder that she could do no more than clutch it to her bosom as she flew. She sent out word that she was not coming down to dinner, and locked herself in with her truth, to make what she could of it.

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CHAPTER XI

ANTEROS

Macartney was no fool in his own world, where a perfectly clear idea of what you want to do combined with a nonchalant manner of "Take it or leave it" had always carried him through the intricacies of business. If he was a fool in supposing that precisely the same armoury would defend him at home, there is this excuse for him, that Lucy had encouraged him to suppose it. When she dashed from the room at this recent moment he sat for some time with his eyes fixed upon his foolscap; but presently found himself reading the same sentence over and over again without understanding one word in it. He dropped the document, rose and picked himself out a cigar, with deliberation and attention disproportionate to the business. He cut, stabbed and lighted the cigar, and stood by the mantelpiece, smoking and gazing out of window.

He had overdone it. He had stretched *régime* too far. There had been a snap. Now, just where had he failed? Was it with Francis Lingen? Perhaps. He must admit, though, that some good had come out of the trouble. He felt reassured about Francis Lingen, because, as he judged, women don't get angry in cases of the kind unless the husband has nothing to be angry about. He felt very world-wise and shrewd as he propounded this. Women like their husbands to be jealous, especially if they are jealous with reason. Because, then, they say to themselves, "Well, anyhow, he loves me still. I have him to fall back upon, at all events." Capital! He gave a short guffaw, and resumed his cigar. But Lucy was angry: obviously because he had wasted good jealousy on a mere fancy. Damn it, he had overdone it. The next thing—if he didn't look out—would be that she would give him something to be jealous of. He must calm her—there would be no difficulty in that, no loss of prestige.

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Prestige: that was the thing you wanted to maintain. Discipline be jiggered—that might do mischief—if you drove it too hard. The fact was, he was a little too sharp with Lucy. She was a dear, gentle creature, and no doubt one fell into the habit of pushing a willing horse. He could see it all now perfectly. He had been put out when he arrived at the Marchants' too early—she was not there; and then that old fool Vane with his, "Saw your wife at the Chelsea thing, with Lingen. They looked very settled"; that had put the lid on. That was how it was; and he had been too sharp. Well, one must make mistakes—

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He wondered what she had meant about the Opera. Why had she harped upon that string? "You

were there before Francis Lingen," she had said—well, and then—she had been furious with him. He had said, "I know that I was," and she, "If that is all your memory brings you—" and off she went. He smoked hard—lifted his hand and dropped it smartly to his mantelpiece. No; that was a thing no man could fathom. A Lucyism—quite clear to herself, no doubt. Well, he'd leave that alone. The more one tried to bottom those waters, the less one fished up. But he would make peace with her after dinner.

He heard, "Mrs. Macartney is not dining this evening; she has a bad headache, and doesn't wish to be disturbed," received it with a curt nod, and accepted it simply. Better to take women at their word. Her troubles would have simmered down by the morning, whereas if he were to go up now, one of two things: either she'd be angry enough to let him batter at the door to no purpose—and feel an ass for his pains; or she would let him in, and make a fuss—in which case he would feel still more of an ass. "Ask Mrs. Macartney if I can do anything," he had said to Smithers, and was answered, "I think Mrs. Macartney is asleep, sir." He hoped she was. That would do her a world of good.

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Morning. In the breakfast-room he faced a Lucy self-possessed, with guarded eyes, and, if he could have seen it, with implied reproach stiffening every line of her. Her generosity gratified him, but should have touched him keenly. She came to him at once, and put up her face. "I'm sorry I was so cross, James." His immediate feeling, I say, was one of gratification. That was all right. She had come in. To that succeeded a wave of kindness. He dropped his glass, and took her strongly in his arms. "Dearest, I behaved very badly. I'm truly sorry." He kissed her, and for a moment she clung to him, but avoided his further kisses. Yet he had kissed her as a man should. She had nothing more to say, but he felt it her due that he should add something while yet he held her. "As for poor Francis—I know that I was absurd—I admit it frankly." He felt her shake and guessed her indignation. "You'll believe me, dear. You know I don't like owning myself a fool." Then she had looked up, still in his arms—"Why should you be so stupid? How can you possibly be? You, of all people!" There she was again.

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But he intended to make peace once and for all. "My dearest, I can't be more abject, for the life of me. I have confessed that I was an abounding ass. Please to believe in me. Ask Francis Lingen to tea for a month of days—and not a word from me!"

She had laughed, rather scornfully, and tried to free herself. He kissed her again before he let her go. Almost immediately he resumed his habits—eyeglass, *Morning Post*, and scraps of comment. He made an effort and succeeded, he thought, in being himself. "Johnny Mallet gives another party at the Bachelors to-day. I believe I go. Has he asked you? He means to. He's a tufthunter—but he gets tufts.... I see that the Fathers in God are raving about the Tithe Bill. I shall have Jasper Mellen at me—and the Dean too. Do you remember—did you ever hear, I wonder, of *Box and Cox*? They have a knack of coming to me on the same day. Once they met on the doorstep, and each of them turned and fled away. It must have been very comic...." Lucy busied herself with her letters and her coffee-cups. She wished that she did not feel so ruffled, but—a walk would do her good. She would go into the Park presently, and look at the tulips and lilacs. It was horrid to feel so stuffy on such a perfect day. How long to Whitsuntide? That was to be heavenly—if James didn't get inspired by the dark! Something would have to be prepared for that. In her eyes, sedate though they were, there lurked a gleam: the beacon-fire of a woman beleaguered. Certainly Jimmy Urquhart liked her. He had said that she liked him. Well, and so she did. Very much indeed.

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James went, forgiven, to his Bishops and Deans, and to lunch with his Johnny Mallet and the tufted. Lucy, her household duties done, arrayed herself for the tulips of the Park.

The grey watches of the night with their ache and moments of panic, the fever and fret, the wearing down of rage and emptying of wonder and dismay, the broken snatches of dream-sleep, and the heavy slumber which exhaustion finally gave her—all this had brought downstairs, to be kissed, embraced and forgiven, a Lucy disillusioned and tired to death, but schooled to patience. Her conclusion of the whole matter now was that it was James who had indeed loved her in the dark, with an access of passion which he had never shown before and could drop apparently as fitfully as he won to it, and also with a fulness of satisfaction to himself which she did not pretend to understand. It was James and no other, simply because any other was unthinkable. Such things were not done. Jimmy Urquhart—and what other could she imagine it?—was out of the question. She had finally brushed him out as a girl flecks the mirror in a cotillon. It was James; but why he had been so moved, how moved, how so lightly satisfied, how his conduct at other times could be fitted in—really, it didn't matter two straws. It meant nothing but a moment's silliness, it led to nothing, it mended nothing—and it broke nothing. Her soul was her own, her heart was her own. It was amiable of him, she dared say, but had become rather a bore. She conceived of a time at hand when she might have to be careful that he shouldn't. But just now she wouldn't make a fuss. Anything but that. He was within his rights, she supposed; and let it rest at that. So arrayed, she faced him, and, to let nothing be omitted on her part, she herself apologised for what had been his absurd fault, and so won as much from him as he could ever have given anybody. As for Francis Lingen—she had not once given him a thought.

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Now, however, James away to his Bishops, she arrayed herself anew, and went out, *fraîche et dispose*, into the Park, intending that she should see Urquhart. And so she did. He was on horseback and dismounted the moment he saw her. He was glad to see her, she could tell, but did not insist upon his gladness. He admired her, she could see, but took his admiration as a matter of course. She wore champagne-colour. She had snakeskin shoes, a black hat. She was

excited, and had colour; her eyes shone.

"Well," he said, "here you are then. That's a good thing. I began to give you up."

"How did you know—?" She stopped, and bit her lip.

"I didn't. But I'm very glad to see you. You look very well. Where are you going?"

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She nodded her direction. "Tulips. Just over there. I always pilgrimise them."

"All right. Let us pilgrimise them. Tulips are like a drug. A little is exquisite, and you are led on. Excess brings no more enchantment, only nausea. You buy a million and plant your woodland, and the result is horror. A hundred would have been heavenly. That's what I find."

She had mockery in her look, gleams of it shot with happiness to be there. "Is that what you've done at Martley? I shan't praise you when I see it. I hate too-muchness."

"So do I, but always too late. I ought to learn from you, whose frugality is part of your charm. One can't imagine too much Lucy."

"Ah, don't be sure," she cautioned him. "Ask James."

"I shall. I'm quite equal to that. I'll ask him to-day. He's to be at an idiotic luncheon, to which I'm fool enough to be going. Marchionesses and all the rest of it."

"How can you go to such things when you might be—flying?"

"Earning your displeasure? Oh, I know, I know. I didn't know how to refuse Mallet. He seemed to want me. I was flattered. As a matter of fact—I *have* flown."

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"Alone?"

"Good Lord, no. I had an expert there. He let me have the levers. I had an illusion. But I always do."

"Do tell me your illusion."

"I thought that I could sing."

"You did sing, I'm sure."

"I might have. One miracle the more. As for the machine—it wasn't a machine, it was a living spirit."

"A male spirit or a female spirit?"

"Female, I think. Anyhow I addressed it as such."

"What did you say to her?"

"I said, 'You darling.'"

That startled her, if you like! She looked frightened, then coloured deeply. Urquhart seemed full of his own thoughts.

"How's Lancelot?" he asked her.

That helped her. "Oh, he delights me. Another 'living spirit.' He never fails to ask after you."

"Stout chap."

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"He harps on your story. The first you ever told us. This time he put in his postscript, 'How is Wives and Co?'"

He nodded. "Very good. I begat an immortal. That tale will never die. He'll tell it to his grandchildren."

They stood, or strolled at ease, by the railings, she within them, he holding his horse outside them. The tulips were adjudged, names taken, colours approved.

"You'll see mine," he said, "in ten days. Do you realise that?"

She was radiant. "I should think so. That has simply got to happen. Are you going to have other people there?"

"Vera," he said, "and her man, and I rather think Considine, her man's brother. Fat and friendly, with a beard, and knows a good deal about machines, one way and another. I want his advice about hydroplanes, among other things. You'll like him."

"Why shall I like him?"

"Because he's himself. He has no manners at all, only feelings. Nice feelings. That's much better than manners."

"Yes, I dare say they are." She thought about it. "There's a difference between manner and manners."

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"Oh, rather. The more manner you have the less manners."

"Yes, I meant that. But even manners don't imply feelings, do they?"

"I was going to say, Never. But that wouldn't be true. You have charming manners: your feelings' clothes and a jolly good fit."

"How kind you are." She was very pleased. "Now, *you*—what shall I say?"

"You might say that I have no manners, and not offend me. I have no use for them. But I have feelings, sometimes nice, sometimes horrid."

"I am sure that you couldn't be horrid."

"Don't be sure," he said gravely. "I had rather you weren't. I have done amiss in my day, much amiss; and I shall do it again."

She looked gently at him; her mouth showed the Luini compassion, long-drawn and long-suffering, because it understood. "Don't say that. I don't think you mean it."

He shook his head, but did not cease to watch her. "Oh, but I mean it. When I want a thing, I try to get it. When I see my way, I follow it. It seems like a law of Nature. And I suppose it is one. What else is instinct?"

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"Yes," she said, "but I suppose we have feelings in us so that we may realise that other people have them too."

"Yes, yes—or that we may give them to those who haven't got any of their own."

They had become grave, and he, at least, moody. Lucy dared not push enquiry. She had the ardent desire to help and the instinct to make things comfortable on the surface, which all women have, and which makes nurses of them. But she discerned trouble ahead. Urquhart's startling frankness had alarmed her before, and she didn't trust herself to pass it off if it flashed once too often. Flashes like that lit up the soul, and not of the lamp-holder only.

They parted, with unwillingness on both sides, at Prince's Gate, and Lucy sped homewards with feet that flew as fast as her winged thoughts. That "You darling" was almost proof positive. And yet he had been at Peltry that night; and yet he couldn't have dared! Now even as she uttered that last objection she faltered; for when daring came into question, what might he not dare? Remained the first. He had been at Peltry, she knew, because she had been asked to meet him there and had refused on the opera's account. Besides, she had heard about his riding horses as if they were motors, and— Here she stood still; and found herself shaking. That letter—in that letter of Mabel's about his visit to Peltry, had there not been something of a call to London, and return late for dinner? And the opera began at half-past six. What was the date of his call to London? Could she find that letter? And should she hunt for it, or leave it vague? And then she thought of Martley. And then she blushed.

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CHAPTER XII

MARTLEY THICKET (1)

Urquhart was a man of explosive action and had great reserve of strength. He was moved by flashes of insight, and was capable of long-sustained flights of vehement effort; but his will-power was nourished entirely by those moments of intense prevision, which showed him a course, and all the stages of it. The mistakes he made, and they were many and grievous, were mostly due to overshooting his mark, sometimes to underrating it. In the headlong and not too scrupulous adventure he was now upon, both defects were leagued against him.

When he first saw Lucy at her dinner-party, he said to himself, "That's a sweet woman. I shall fall in love with her." To say as much was proof that he had already done so; but it was the sudden conviction of it which inspired him, filled him with effervescent nonsense and made him the best of company, for a dinner-party. Throughout it, at his wildest and most irresponsible, his fancy and imagination were at work upon her. He read her to the soul, or thought so.

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Chance, and Lancelot, gave him the chart of the terrain. The switch at the drawing-room door gave him his plan. The opportunity came, and he dared to take it. He marked the effect upon her. It was exactly what he had foreseen. He saw her eyes humid upon Macartney, her hand at rest on his arm. Jesuitry palliated what threatened to seem monstrous, even to him. "God bless her, I drive her to her man. What's the harm in that?"

So he went on—once more, and yet again; and in the meantime by daylight and by more honest ways he gained her confidence and her liking. He saw no end to the affair so prosperously begun, and didn't trouble about one. All he cared about just now were two courtships—the vicarious in the dark, and the avowed of the daylight.

He intended to go on. He was full of it—in the midst of his other passions of the hour, such as this of the air. He was certain of his direction, as certain as he had ever been. But now his mistakes

and miscalculations began. He had mistaken his Lucy, and his Macartney too.

What he didn't know about Macartney, Lucy did know; what he didn't know about Lucy was that she had found out James. James as Eros wouldn't do, chiefly because such conduct on James's part would have been incredible. Urquhart didn't know it would be incredible, nor did he know that she did. [Pg 150]

One other thing he didn't know, which was that Lucy was half his own before she started for Martley. She, in fact, didn't know it either. She had been his from the moment when she had asked him to keep out of the air, and he had declined.

All this is necessary matter, because in the light of it his next deliberated move in his game was a bad mistake.

On the night before she was expected at Martley, being there himself, he wrote her a letter to this effect:

"Dear Mrs. Macartney: To my dismay and concern I find that I can't be here to receive you, nor indeed until you are on the point to go away. I shall try hard for Sunday, which will give me one day with you—better to me than a thousand elsewhere. Vera will be my curate. Nothing will be omitted which will show you how much Martley owes you, or how much I am, present or absent, yours,

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"J. U."

That letter he gave to Vera Nugent to deliver to Lucy. Vera wanted to know what it was all about.

"It's to say that I can't be here," he said. "That is the fact, unfortunately."

"Why, my dear Jimmy, I thought you adored her. Isn't the poor lady the very latest?"

"My dear girl, I do adore her. Leave it at that. It's an excellent reason for not being here: the best. But I'm going up with a star, which is another reason. And I hope to be here on Sunday, which is the most I can afford myself. Really, that's all. But you like her, you say; or you should."

"I do like her. She's not very talkative—to me; but listens well. Considine will like her. Listeners are rare with him, poor dear. But you move me. I didn't know you were so far gone."

"Never mind how far I am gone, provided that I go," said Urquhart.

"Oh, at this rate, I will hasten you. I can't be bothered with a *cause célèbre*. But what am I to tell the lady? You must be practical, my fine man." [Pg 152]

"Tell her that I was sent for in a hurry. Hint at the air if you think proper. I think I have said all that is necessary in the note."

The Macartneys were expected to lunch. Urquhart left his house at noon, driving himself in a motor. He disappeared in the forest, but didn't go very far.

James heard of his host's defection with impassivity and a glance of his eyeglass. "Wonder what Jimmy has shied off for?" he said to Lucy through the dressing-room door. "Aeroplaning or royalty, do you think? The —s may have sent for him. I know he knows them. But it's characteristic. He makes a fuss about you, so that you think you're his life or death; and then you find out—not at all! You simply don't exist—that's all. What do you think?"

"I don't think that we don't exist," she said. "I think that something important has happened."

"Oh, well," said James, "one had got into the way of thinking that one was important oneself. D—d cool, I call it."

There had been a moment when Lucy knew anger; but that had soon passed. She knew that she was bitterly disappointed, and found a rueful kind of happiness in discovering how bitterly. She had reached the stage where complete happiness seems to be rooted in self-surrender. In a curious kind of way the more she suffered the more surely she could pinch herself on the chin and say, "My dear, you are caught." There was comfort in this—and Martley itself, house, gardens, woodlands, the lake, the vistas of the purple wolds of forest country, all contributed to her enchaining. Luncheon passed off well under Vera Nugent's vivacious brown eyes, which could not penetrate the gentle mask of Lucy's manner. Nugent the husband was a sleepy, good-humoured giant; Lord Considine, whose beard was too long, and jacket-sleeves much too short—as were his trousers—"his so-called trousers," as James put it in his scorn—talked fiercely about birds'-nests and engaged Lucy for the whole afternoon. This was not allowed him by his sister-in-law, who had other more sociable plans, but the good man had his pleasure of a docile listener after tea, took her for a great walk in the woods, and exhibited nearly all his treasures, though, as he said, she should have been there six weeks earlier. Alas, if she had been, she would have had a more open mind to give to the birds and their affairs. [Pg 154]

After dinner, when they were on the terrace under the stars, he returned to his subject. There were nightingales, it seemed. What did Mrs. Macartney say to that? It appeared that six miles away the nightingale was an unknown fowl. Here, of course, they were legionaries. You might hear six at a time: two triangles of them. Did she know that they sang in triangles? She did not. Very well, then: what did she say? What about shoes—a cloak—a shawl? All these things could be brought. Lucy said that she would fetch them for herself, and went upstairs—shallow, broad stairs of black oak, very much admired by the experts. But of them and their excellence she had no thought. She did not care to let her thoughts up to the surface just then. Adventure beckoned her.

When she returned Nugent had withdrawn himself to the smoking-room, and James was talking to Vera Nugent about people one knew. Neither of them was for nightingales. "You are very foolhardy," James said. "I can't help you with nightingales." Lord Considine, in a black Spanish cloak, with the staff of a pilgrim to Compostella, offered his arm. "We'll go first to the oak Spinney," he said. "It's rather spongy, I'm afraid, but who minds a little cold water?" Vera assured him that she did for one, and James added that he was rather rheumatic. "Come along, Mrs. Macartney," said the lord. "These people make me sorry for them." So they went down the steps and dipped into the velvet night.

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It was barely dark skirting the lake. You could almost see the rings made by rising trout, and there was enough of you visible at least to send the waterfowl scuttering from the reeds. Beyond that again, you could descry the pale ribbon of the footpath, and guess at the exuberant masses of the peony bushes, their heavy flowers, when they were white, still smouldering with the last of the sunset's fire. But once in the woods you had to feel your way, and the silence of it all, like the darkness, was thick, had a quality which you discovered only by the soft close touch of it upon your cheeks and eyes. It seemed to clog the ears, and made breathing a deeper exercise. The further in they went the greater the guesswork of the going. Lord Considine went in front, to keep the branches from her face.

Upon that rich, heavy silence the first birds' song stole like a sense of tears: the low, tentative, pensive note which seems like the welling of a vein. Lucy stayed and breathlessly listened. The doubtfulness, the strain of longing in it chimed with her own mood, which was one, perhaps, of passive wonderment. She waited, as one who is to receive; she was not committed, but she was prepared: everything was to come. The note was held, it waxed, it called, and then broke, as it were, into a fountain of crystal melody. Thereafter it purred of peace, it floated and stopped short as if content. But out of the dark another took up the song, and further off another, provoking our first musician to a new stave. Lucy, with parted lips, held her heart. Love was in this place, overshadowing her; her sightless eyes were wide, waiting upon it; and it came. She heard a step in the thicket; she stayed without motion, will or thought. *Expectans expectavit*. She was in the strange arms, and the strange kisses were on her parted lips.

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She knew not, nor cared, how long this rapture held. She got, and she gave. James, or another, this was Eros who had her now. She heard, "Oh, Lucy, oh, my love, my love," and she thought to have answered, "You have me—what shall I do?" But she had no reply to her question, and seemed to have no desire unsatisfied.

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Lord Considine's voice calling, "I say, shall we go on—or do you think you had better go in?" sounded a very homely note. Her Eros still held her, even as she answered, "Perhaps we had better turn back now. I could stop out forever on such a night. It has been more beautiful than I can say." Approval of the sentiment expressed was stamped upon her. For a moment of wild surrender she clung as she kissed; then she was gently relinquished, and the lord was at hand. "There's nothing quite like it, is there?" he said. "I've heard astounding orchestras of birds in South America; but nothing at all like this—which, moreover, seems to me at its best in England. In Granada, up there in the Wellington elms, they absolutely—mind, mind, here's a briar-root—they shout at you. There's a brazen hardihood about them. In Athens, too, in the King's Garden, it is a kind of clamour of sound—like an Arab wedding. No, no, I say that we are unrivalled for nightingales." The enthusiastic man galloped on, and Lucy, throbbing in the dark, was grateful to him.

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The lights of the house recalled her to the world. Presently, up the slope, she saw Vera Nugent, at the piano, turning to say something to somebody. It was James, rather bored in an arm-chair. James liked neither the society of women nor the notes of a piano. But he liked still less for such things to be known of him. His own social standard may perhaps be put thus: he liked to appear bored without boring his companions. On the whole he flattered himself that, high as it was, he nearly always reached it.

"Where's my beautiful young brother?" said Lord Considine, plunging in upon them. "Asleep, I'll take my oath. My dear Vera, you are too easy with him. The man is getting mountainous. You two little know what you've missed—hey, Mrs. Macartney?" He was obviously overheated, but completely at ease with himself.

"What do you say we have missed?" Vera asked of James, and he now, on his feet, said bravely, "For myself, a nasty chill." A chill—out there!

Lucy was asked, Did she like it all, and boldly owned, All. "The dark is like an eiderdown bed.

Impossible to imagine anything softer." She rubbed her eyes. "It has made me dreadfully sleepy," she said. "I think, if you won't be horrified—" Vera said that she should go up with her. James stooped to her cheek, Lord Considine bowed over her hand.

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In Lucy's room the pair had a long talk, all of which I don't pretend to report. It began with, "I'm so glad that you take to poor Considine. You are so very much his sort of woman. He's a dear, simple creature, far too good for most of us—and a Nugent freak, I assure you. They've never known the like in the County of Cork.... I like him immensely, but of course he's too remote for the like of me. No small talk, you know, and I'm aburst with it. I talk while I'm thinking, and he when he *has* thought. You understand that kind, evidently. I suppose your clever husband is like that. Not that I don't get on with *him*. We did excellently—I think he knew everybody that I could think of, and I everybody he chose to mention. But Jimmy likes Considine, you know.... By the way, it was very disgraceful of Jimmy, but not so disgraceful as you might think. In its way it's a compliment. He thinks so much of you—Oh, I may as well tell you the shocking truth. He ran away. What a moth in the drawing-room ought to do, but never can, Jimmy, not at all a moth, quite suddenly did. My dear Mrs. Macartney, Jimmy ran away from you. Flying! I doubt it profoundly. Wrestling, I fancy, fighting beasts at Ephesus. You have doubtless discovered how enthusiastic Jimmy is. Most attractive, no doubt, but sometimes embarrassing. As once, when we were in Naples—in the funicolare, halfway up Vesuvius—Jimmy sees a party at the other end of the carriage: mother, daughter, two pig-tailed children, *and* a governess—quite a pretty gel. Jimmy was enormously struck with this governess. He could see nothing else, and nobody else either, least of all me, of course. He muttered and rolled his eyes about—his chin jutted like the bow of a destroyer. Presently he couldn't stand it. He marched across the carriage and took off his hat with a bow—my dear, to the governess, poor gel! 'I beg your pardon,' says he, 'but I have to tell you something. I think you are the most beautiful person I ever saw in my life, and take pride in saying so.' Wasn't it awful? I didn't dare look at them—but it seemed all right afterwards. I suppose she told her people that of course he was mad. So he is, in a way; but it's quite nice madness. I won't say that Jimmy never goes too far—but nobody could be nicer about it afterwards than Jimmy—no one. He's awfully sorry, and contrite, and all that. Most people like him amazingly. I suppose he's told you about our father? He loves all the stories there are about him ..." and so on. Vera Nugent was a great talker.

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Lucy at her prayers, Lucy in her bed, had large gaps in the sequence of her thoughts. Safety lay only with Lancelot. She could centre herself in him. Lancelot it was who with forceful small fingers, and half-shy, half-sly eyes, finally closed down hers, with a "Go to sleep, you tired mamma."

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CHAPTER XIII

MARTLEY THICKET (2)

The day that succeeded was prelude to the night, sufficient to show Lucy her way into that spacious unknown. By her own desire she passed it quietly, and had leisure to review and to forecast.

She put it to herself, roughly, thus. I may guess, but I don't know, who loves me so. It cannot continue—it shall stop this very night. But this one night I must go to him, if only to say that it can never be again. And it won't be again; I am sure of that. However he may take it, whatever he may be driven to, he will do what I say must be. As for me, I don't think women can ever be very happy. I expect I shall get used to it—one does, to almost anything, except toothache. And I have Lancelot. She put all this quite frankly to herself, not shirking the drab outlook or the anguish of doing a thing for the last time—always a piercing ordeal for her. As for James, if she thought of him at all, it was with pity. Poor dear, he really was rather dry!

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She ought to have been very angry with Urquhart, but she was not. "The first time he did it, I understand. I am sure he had a sudden thought, and couldn't resist it. It must have been more than half fun, and the rest because it was so romantic. The other times were much more wrong. But I'm not angry with him. I ought to be—but I'm not—not at all. I suppose that is because I couldn't be angry with him if I tried ... not if he did much more.... No, I am sure he doesn't hold me cheap. He's not at all like that. James might—only James holds all women cheap. But He doesn't. I never felt at all like this about a man before. Only—it must stop, after this once...."

You see, he had not kindled passion in her, even if there were any to be kindled. Lucy, with a vehement imagination, lacked initiative. You could touch her in a moment, if you knew how, or if you were the right person. Now Urquhart had never touched, though he had excited, her. To be touched you must respond to a need of hers—much more than have a need of your own. And to be the right person you must be empowered, according to Lucy. Urquhart was not really empowered, but an usurper. Of course he didn't know that. He reasoned hastily, and superficially. He thought her to be like most women, struck by audacity. What really struck her about him were his timeliness—he had responded to a need of hers when he had first kissed her—and his rare moments of tenderness. "You darling!" Oh, if James could only have said that instead of "My darling!" Poor James, what a goose he was.

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It was a very peaceful day. James and Nugent had driven out to play golf on some first-class

course or other by the sea. Lord Considine was busy with his secretary over a paper for the British Association. In the afternoon he promised Lucy sight of two golden orioles, and kept his promise. She had leisure to look about her and find traces of Urquhart in much that was original, and more that was comfortable and intimate, in Martley Thicket. It was a long two-storeyed house of whitewashed brick, with a green slate roof, intermixed with reed-thatch, deep-eaved and verandahed along the whole south front. The upper windows had green *persanes*. The house stood on the side of a hill, was terraced, and looked over a concave of fine turf into a valley, down whose centre ran the lake, at whose bottom was the wood; and beyond that the moors and beech-

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masses of the forest. Beside the house, and behind it, was a walled kitchen garden, white-walled, with a thatch atop. On the other side were stables, kennels and such-like. Everything was grown to the top of its bent; but there was nothing very rare. "No frills," said Lord Considine, and approved of it all. "I dare say a woman would beautify it, but it would cease to be Jimmy's and would cease to be interesting too. She would have more flowers and fewer shrubs. Now Jimmy knows enough about it to understand that shrubs and trees are the real test of gardening. Anybody can grow flowers; but shrubs want science." Lucy felt rebuked. She had desiderated more flowers. James, who knew nothing and cared little about gardens, passed approval of the house and offices. "It doesn't smell of money," he said, "and yet you see what a lot it means when you look into it." Success, in fact, without visible effort: one of James's high standards. He didn't know how Jimmy got his money, but had no doubts at all of its being there. A man who could lend Francis Linggen £10,000 without a thought must be *richissime*. Yet Jimmy had no men-servants in the house, and James glared about him for the reason. Lucy had a reason. "I suppose, you know,

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he wants to be really comfortable," she proposed, and James transferred his mild abhorrence to her. "Comfortable, without a fellow to put out his things!" He scoffed at her. But she was rather short with him, even testy. "My dear James, Mr. Urquhart's things are things to be put on or taken off—like Lord Considine's 'so-called clothes.' To you they seem to be robes of ceremony, or sacrificial vestments." James stared rather through than at her, as if some enemy lurked behind her. "My clothes seem to annoy you. May I suggest that somebody must get the mud off them, and that I had rather it wasn't me? As for ceremony—" But she had gone. James shrugged her out of mind, and wondered vaguely if she was rather attracted by Jimmy Urquhart. It was bound to be somebody—at her age. Thirty-two she must be, when they begin to like a fling. Well, there was nothing in it. Later on it occurred to him that she was looking uncommonly well just now. He saw her, in white, cross the lawn: a springy motion, a quick lift, turn of the head. She looked a girl, and a pretty one at that. His heart warmed to her. How could a man have a better wife than that? Success without effort again! There it was.

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The evening came, the close of a hot and airless day. The sun set heavy and red. A bluish mist seemed to steal out of the forest and shroud the house. The terrace was not used after dinner, and when the men joined Vera and her in the drawing-room Lord Considine, who had proposed a game of chess to James at the table, now came forward with board and box of men. Nugent, as usual, had disappeared. "He's dormant when there's no hunting," his wife explained. "He has nothing to kill and hates his fellow-creatures." "Then," said James, "he might kill some of them. I could furnish him with a rough list." Lucy felt restless and strayed about the room, looking at things here and there without seeing them. Vera watched her, saw her wander to the open window and stand there looking gravely into the dark. She said nothing, and presently Lucy stepped out and disappeared. Vera, with raised eyebrows and a half smile, resumed her book.

Lucy was now high-hearted on her quest—her quest and mission. It was to be this once, and for the last time. She followed the peony path from the lake to the thicket, entered among the trees and pushed her way forward. Long before she reached the scene of last night's wonder she was a prisoner, her lips a prize. There was very little disguise left now. For a full time they clung together and loved without words; but then he spoke. "So you came! I hoped, I waited, I thought that you might. Oh, my Lucy, what a fact for me!"

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She answered simply and gently, "I came—I had to come—but—"

"Well, my love?"

"Ah," she said, "but this must be for the last time." This was not taken as she had meant it to be. Love began again. Then he said, "That's absurd."

"No, no," she protested, "it's right. It must be so. You would not have me do anything else."

"And I must go?"

"Yes, indeed, you must go now."

"Not yet, Lucy. Soon."

"No, at once," she told him. "The last time is come, and gone. You must not keep me."

"Let me talk to you, so, for a few minutes. There's everything to say."

"No," she said, "tell me nothing. I dare not know it. Please let me go now."

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"A last time, then, Lucy." She yielded her lips, but unwillingly; for now her mind was made up. The thing had to be done, and the sooner the better.

"Ah," he said, "how can I let you go?"

"Easily," she answered, "when I ask you"; and was unanswerable. She forced herself free, and

stood undecided.

"You needn't go back yet," he said, but she thought she must.

"I came out alone," she told him, "but Vera was in the room. So were the others. I don't know what they will think."

"Nothing at all," he said. "Well, everything shall be as you wish. You see that you have only to name your wish."

"I have one thing to ask you—I dare not ask any more," she said. Her voice had a wavering sound.

"Ask," he said, "and I'll tell you the truth."

"You don't think it wicked of me, to have come? Because I did come. I thought that I must, because—because I could never explain at any other time, in any other way. You don't think—lightly of me?"

"Oh, my dear, my dear," he said—and she felt him tremble, though he did not touch her. "I think more dearly of you than of anything in heaven. The world holds no other woman for me. So it will always be." [Pg 170]

She said quietly, "It's very wonderful. I don't understand it at all. I thought perhaps—I wondered—if I had been angry—"

"I deserve that, and more."

"I know I ought to be angry. So I should be if—"

"Well, my love, well?"

But she couldn't tell him, and asked him to let her go. They parted at the entry of the wood with Good night, and Lucy flitted back with a pain in her heart like the sound of wailing. But women can wail at heart and show a fair face to the world. Her stretched smile had lost none of its sweetness, her eyes none of their brightness. Vera Nugent watched her narrowly, and led the conversation upstairs. She thought that she detected a pensive note, but assured herself that all was pretty well. "That's a remarkable woman," she said to herself, "who would rather have a headache now than grin with misery next week. After this I'd trust her anywhere."

On Sunday morning Urquhart made an explicit return to Martley, arriving at the hour of eleven in his motor of battleship grey colour and formidable fore-extension. Behind it looked rather like a toy. Lucy had gone to church alone, for James never went, and Vera Nugent simply looked appealing and then laughed when she was invited. That was her way of announcing her religion, and a pleasant one. Lord Considine was out for the day, with sandwiches bulging his pockets. Nugent had been invisible since overnight. He was slugging, said his wife. [Pg 171]

Returning staidly through the wood, she saw Urquhart waiting for her at the wicket, and saw him, be it owned, through a veil of mist. But it was soon evident, from his address, that the convention set up was to be maintained. The night was to take care of itself; the day was to know nothing of it, officially. His address was easy and light-hearted. "Am I to be forgiven? Can I expect it? Let me tell you that I do expect it. You know me better than to suppose that I didn't want to be here on your first visit."

She answered him with the same spirit. "I think you might have been, I must say."

"No, I couldn't. There was no doubt about it. I simply had to go." [Pg 172]

"So Vera told me." Then she dared. "May I ask if you went far?"

He tipped his head sideways. "Too far for my peace of mind, anyhow."

"That tells me nothing. I am not to know any more?"

"You are to know what you please."

"Well," she said, "I please to forget it. Now I had better tell you how much I love Martley. James says that the house is perfect in its way; but I say that you have done justice to the site, and think it higher praise."

"It is. I'm much obliged to you. The problem was—not to enhance the site, for that was out of the question; rather to justify the impertinence of choosing to put any building there. Because of course you see that any house is an impertinence in a forest."

"Yes, of course—but not yours."

Urquhart shrugged. "I'm not afraid of your flatteries, because I know," he said. "The most that can be said for me is that I haven't choked it up with scarlet and orange flowers. There's not a geranium in the place, and I haven't even a pomegranate in a tub, though I might."

"Oh, no," she said warmly, "there's nothing finicky about your garden—any more than there is about you. There was never such a man of direction—at least I never met one." The moment she [Pg 173]

had said it she became embarrassed; but he took no notice. His manner was perfect. They returned by the lake, and stayed there a while to watch Nugent trying to catch trout. The rest of the day she spent in Urquhart's company, who contrived with a good deal of ingenuity to have her to himself while appearing to be generally available. After dinner, feeling sure of him, she braved the tale-bearing woods and nightingales vocal of her sweet unease. There was company on this occasion, but she felt certain it would not have been otherwise had they been retired with the night. She was thoughtful and quiet, and really her heart was full of complaining. He was steadily cheerful, and affected a blunt view of life at large.

She did not look forward to leaving him on the morrow, and as good as said so. "I have been enchanted here," she said, "and hate the thought of London. But James won't hear of Wycross in June. He loves the world."

Urquhart said, "What are you going to do in August? Wycross?"

"No, we never go there in August. It's too hot— And there's Lancelot. A boy must have excitement. I expect it will come to my taking him to the sea, unless James consents to Scotland. We used to do that, but now—well, he's bored there."

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He was looking at her, she felt, though she couldn't see him. "Did you ever go to Norway?" She shook her head. He said no more on that head just then.

"I shall see you in London," he told her. "I am going to take my Certificate at Brooklands. Next week I hope. You might come and applaud."

"No, indeed," said she. "I couldn't bear to see you in those conditions. I have nerves, if you have none."

"I have plenty," he said, "but you ought to do it. Some day you will have to face it."

"Why shall I?" He wouldn't tell her.

That made her daring. "Why shall I?"

His first answer was a steady look; his second, "Nothing stops, you know. Things all swim to a point. Ebb and flow. They don't go back until they reach it."

"And then?"

"And then they may—or they may not blot it out and swim on."

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CHAPTER XIV

THE GREAT SCHEME

The height of her esteem for Urquhart was the measure of her growing disrelish for James. It was hard to visit upon a man the sense that he was not what he had never dreamed of being; but that is what happened to him. By how much he had risen in her eyes when she made an Eros of him, by so much did he fall when she found out her mistake. Because he was obviously no Eros, was he so obviously but part of a man? It seemed so indeed. If he discerned it there's no wonder. He irritated her; she found herself instinctively combating his little preparations for completeness of effect—she was herself all for simplicity in these days. She could not conceal her scorn, for instance, when he refused to go with her to dine in a distant suburb because he would not have time to dress. "As if," she said, "you eat your shirt-front!" Trenchancy from James produced a silent disapproval. As he said, if she didn't sniff, she looked as if she felt a cold coming on. She knew it herself and took great pains; but it coloured her tone, if not her words. Too often she was merely silent when he was very much himself. Silence is contagious: they passed a whole dinner through without a word, sometimes.

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Now James had his feelings, and was rather unhappy over what he called her moods. He thought she did not go out enough. She ought to see more people: a woman liked to be admired. It did not occur to him that she might have been very glad of it from him; but then he didn't know how highly she had been elated with what she called, thinking it really so, his love-in-the-darkness. No, Macartney, if ever he looked into himself, found nothing wrong there. He kept a wary eye through his masking-glass upon Urquhart's comings and goings. As far as he could ascertain he was rarely in London during June and early July. No doubt he wrote to Lucy; James was pretty sure of it; yet he could not stoop to examining envelopes, and had to leave that to Providence and herself. He mingled with his uneasiness a high sense of her integrity, which he could not imagine ever losing. It was, or might have been, curious to observe the difference he made between his two jealousies. He had been insolent to Francis Lingen, with his "Ha, Lingen, you here?" He was markedly polite to Jimmy Urquhart, much more so than his habit was. He used to accompany him to the door when he left, an unheard-of attention. But that may have been because Lucy went thither also.

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As a matter of fact Urquhart saw very little of her. He was very much away, on his aerial and other affairs, and did not care to come to the house unless James was there, nor, naturally, very

much when he was. They mostly met in the Park, rarely at other people's houses. Once she lunched at the Nugents' and had the afternoon alone with him; twice he drove her to Kew Gardens; once she asked him for a week-end to Wycross, and they had some talks and a walk. He wrote perhaps once a week, and she answered him perhaps once a fortnight. Not more. She had to put the screw on herself to outdo him in frugality. She respected him enormously for his mastery of himself, and could not have told how much it enhanced her love. It was really comical that precisely what she had condemned James for she found admirable in Jimmy. James had neglected her for his occupations, and Jimmy was much away about his. In the first case she resented, in the second she was not far from adoration of such a sign of serious strength.

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They never alluded directly to what had happened, but sometimes hinted at it. These hints were always hers, for Urquhart was a random talker, said what came into his head and had no eye for implications. He made one odd remark, and made it abruptly, as if it did not affect anybody present. "It's a very funny thing," he said, "that last year I didn't know Macartney had a wife, and now, six months later, I don't realise that you have got a husband." It made her laugh inwardly, but she said gently, "Try to realise it. It's true."

"You wish me to make a point of it?" he asked her that with a shrewd look.

"I wish you, naturally, to realise me as I am."

"There doesn't seem much of you involved in it," he said; but she raised her eyebrows patiently.

"It is a fact, and the fact is a part of me. Besides, there's Lancelot."

"Oh," he said, "I don't forget him. You needn't think it. He is a symbol of you—and almost an emanation. Put it like this, that what you might have been, he is."

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"Oh," said she, "do you want me to be different?"

He laughed. "Bless you, no. But I like to see what you gave up to be made woman. And I see it in your boy."

She was impelled to say what she said next by his words, which excited her. "I can't tell you—and perhaps I ought not—how happy you make me by loving Lancelot. I love him so very much—and James never has. I can't make out why; but it was so from the beginning. That was the first thing which made me unhappy in my life at home. It was the beginning of everything. He seemed to lose interest in me when he found me so devoted."

Urquhart said nothing immediately. Then he spoke slowly. "Macartney is uneasy with boys because he's uneasy with himself. He is only really interested in one thing, and he can see that they are obviously uninterested in it."

"You mean—?" she began, and did not finish.

"I do," said Urquhart. "Most men are like that at bottom—only some of us can impose ourselves upon our neighbours more easily than he can. Half the marriages of the world break on that rock, and the other half on idleness."

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She then confessed. "Do you know what I believe in my heart? I believe that James's eyeglass stands in his way with Lancelot—as it certainly did with me."

"I think you are right there," he agreed. "But you must allow for it. He's very uncertain of his foothold, and that's his war armour."

She was more tolerant of James after that conversation, and less mutinous against her lot. She wondered, of course, what was to become of them, how long she could hold him at arms' length, how she could bring herself to unsay what had been said in the dark of Martley Thicket. But she had boundless faith in Urquhart, and knew, among other things, that any request she made him would be made easy for her.

But when, at the end of June, he broached to her his great scheme, she was brought face to face with the situation, and had to ask herself, could she be trusted? That he could she knew very well.

He had a project for a month or six weeks in Norway. He had hinted at it when she was at Martley, but now it was broached. He didn't disguise it that his interest lay wholly in her coming. He laid it before her: she, Lancelot and James were to be the nucleus. He should ask the Corbets and their boys, Vera and hers. Nugent would refuse, he knew. Meantime, what did she say? He watched her shining eyes perpending, saw the gleam of anticipated delight. What a plan! But then she looked down, hesitating. Something must now be said.

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"Oh, of course Lancelot would go mad with joy, and I dare say I could persuade James—"

"Well? But you?"

"I should live every moment of the time, but—sometimes life seems to cost too much."

He held out his hand to her, and she took it very simply. "Promise to come, and you shan't repent it. Mind, you have my word on that." Then he let her go, and they discussed ways and means. She would speak to James; then he should come and dine, and talk it out. Meantime, let him make sure of Vera, and do his best with the Corbets. If they were fixed up, as she thought probable, he

might get some other people. Considine might like it. "He's very much at your disposal, let me tell you. You have him at your feet."

So it was settled, and James was attacked in front. She told him as they were driving out to dinner that she had met Mr. Urquhart that afternoon. "I dare say you might," said James. But he had stiffened to attention. [Pg 182]

"He blazed upon me a plan for August. I said I would ask you about it."

James said, "H'm. Does it rest with me?"

"Naturally it does. I should not think of any plans without talking to you."

"No, I suppose you wouldn't," said he. Then he asked, "And what does Urquhart want you to do?"

"He doesn't want me, particularly. He wants all three of us."

"I think," said James, "you'll find that he wants you most."

She felt that this must be fathomed. "And if he did," she said, "should you object to that?" He kept very dry.

"It isn't a case of objecting to that, or this. The question before me at present is whether I want to form one of a party which doesn't want me, and where I might be in the way."

"From what I know of Mr. Urquhart," she answered, "I don't think he would ever ask a person he didn't want."

"He might, if he couldn't get the person he did want in any other way," said James. "Who else is to come?" [Pg 183]

"Vera Nugent and her boy, and perhaps Lord Considine. He is going to ask Laurence and Mabel and all the boys too."

"It will be a kind of school-treat," said James. "I own it doesn't sound very exciting. Where are we to go to?"

"To Norway. He knows of a house on the Hardanger Fiord, a house in a wood. He wants to hire a steamer to take us up from Bergen, and means to bring a motor-boat with him. There will be fishing of sorts if you want it."

"I don't," said James; then held up his chin. "Is my tie straight?"

She looked. "Perfectly. What am I to say to Mr. Urquhart?"

He said, "I'll talk about it; we'll discuss it in all its bearings. I don't think I'm so attracted as you are, but then—"

"It's very evident you aren't," Lucy said, and no more. She felt in a prickly heat, and thought that she had never wanted anything so much in her life as this which was about to be denied her. She dared not write to Lancelot about it; but to Urquhart she confessed her despair and hinted at her longing. He replied at once, "Ask me to dinner. I'll tackle him. Vera and child will come; not Considine. The Corbets can't—going to Scotland, yachting. We needn't have another woman, but Vera will be cross if there is no other man. Up to you to find one." [Pg 184]

This again she carried to James, who said, "Let him come—any free night. Tell me which you settle, will you?"

James had been thinking it out. He knew he would have to go, and was prepared with what he called a spoke for Jimmy's wheel. Incidentally it would be a nasty one for Lucy, and none the worse for that. He considered that she was getting out of hand, and that Urquhart might be a nuisance because such a spiny customer to tackle. But he had a little plan, and chuckled over it a good deal when he was by himself.

He was, as usual, excessively urbane to Urquhart when they met, and himself opened the topic of the Norwegian jaunt. Urquhart took up the ball. "I think you might come. Your wife and boy will love it, and you'll kindle at their joy. 'They for life only, you for life in them,' to flout the bard. Besides, you are not a fogey, if I'm not. I believe our ages tally. You shall climb mountains with me, Macartney, and improve the muscles of your calves. You don't fish, I think. Nor do I. I thought I should catch your brother-in-law with that bait—but no. As for mine, he'll spend the month in bed somewhere." [Pg 185]

"Is your sister coming?" James asked.

Urquhart nodded. "And her youngster. Osborne boy, and a good sort. Lancelot and he have met."

"They'll fight," said James, "and Mrs. Nugent and Lucy won't speak."

"Vera would speak, I'm sure," said Lucy, "and as for me, I seldom get a chance."

"A very true saying," said Urquhart. "I don't believe the Last Judgment would prevent Vera from talking. Well, Macartney, what says the Man of the World?"

"If you mean me," said James, "I gather that you all want to go. Lucy does, but that's of course. Lancelot will, equally of course. But I have a suggestion to make. Might not the party be a little

bigger?"

"It might, and it should," said Urquhart; "in fact, I asked Considine to join us. He would love it, but he has to make a speech at a Congress, or read a paper, and he says he can't get out of it. The Corbets can't come. I'll ask anybody else you like."

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James, who was now about to enjoy himself, said, "I leave the ladies to Lucy and Mrs. Nugent. Their choice would no doubt be mine. But I certainly think we want another man. Much as you and I esteem each other, my dear Urquhart, if there's walking to be done—serious walking, I think we shall be better three than two. I don't at all agree that three is no company. Where men are concerned I think it better than two or four. If only to give a knee, or hold the sponge! And with more than four you become a horde. We want a man now."

"I think so too," Urquhart said. "Well, who's your candidate?"

James meditated, or appeared to meditate. "Well," he said, looking up and fixing Urquhart with his eyeglass, "what do you say to Francis Lingen? Lucy likes him, I am used to him, and you will have to be some day."

Lucy was extremely annoyed. That was evident. She bit her lip, and crumbled her bread. She said shortly, "Francis couldn't walk to save his life."

"Let us put it another way," said James, enjoying his little *coup*. "Let us say that if he did walk, he might save his life."

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Urquhart marked the breeze, and sailed into it. "I leave all that to you. All I know about Lingen is that I have done my best to oblige him in his private affairs. I confess that I find him mild, not to say insipid, but I dare say he's the life of a party when he's put to it."

"Oh," said James, not averse from disparaging an old rival, "Oh, poor chap, he hasn't many party tricks. I'd back him at cat's-cradle, and I dare say he plays a very fair game at noughts-and-crosses. Besides, he'll do what he's told, and fetch things for you. You'll find him a handy and obliging chap to have about."

"Sounds delightful," said Urquhart pleasantly. He turned to Lucy. "We'll give him Lingen, shall we?"

She said, "By all means. It doesn't matter in the least to me."

So James had his little whack, after all.

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CHAPTER XV

JAMES

James, hardly knowing it, was bracing himself for a serious situation. He had a keen eye for a man, a feeling for style; in his judgment Urquhart was momentous, so much so that he could not afford to be irritated. Jealousy to him was a weakness, only pardonable when the cause was trivial. It had been trivial with poor Lingen. Fishing in heavy water, a skipjack snaps at your fly, and you jerk him out to bank with a Devil take you. But the swirling shoulder, the long ridge across the pool, and the steady strain: you are into a twelve-pounder, and the Devil is uninvoked.

He asked Jimmy to lunch at his club, and took the candid line about the Norwegian project. Lucy was desperately tired, he said, so he was pleased with the scheme. The poor dear girl was run down, the fact was. "You are very good for her, I believe. You exhilarate her; she forgets her troubles. She admires audacity—from the bank."

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"I'll be as audacious as you please," said Jimmy.

"Oh, you won't take me in," James said. "I'm an old hand. I know my Urquhart. But Lucy will expect feats of strength. You are a champion."

"D— your eyes!" said Urquhart to himself.

"The boy is one of your slaves, too. I can't tell you how contented I am that you approve of him."

"He's all right," said Urquhart, who didn't like all this. James, on the contrary, liked it awfully. He became a chatterbox.

"He's more than that in his mother's esteem. But Lucy's a wise mother. She moves with her finger on her lip. And that, mind you, without coddling. She'll risk him to the hair's-breadth—and never a word. But she won't risk herself. Not she! Why, she might be wanted! But there it is. Women can do these things, God knows how! It's men who make a fuss. Well, well—but I babble."

"My dear man," said Urquhart, "not at all. It's a thing you never do."

Thus encouraged, James plugged onwards. He talked more of himself and his affairs than he had ever done in his life before; expatiated upon his growing business, assumed his guest's contentment in his happiness, invited praise of his Lucy, and was not rebuffed at their denial.

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Urquhart, at first amused, ended by being annoyed. He felt as if James was a busy dwarf engaged in tying him up in lengths of black cotton. Round and round he went, coil after coil was added; before luncheon was over he could move neither hand nor foot. It was rather ludicrous, really; reduced to speechlessness, he sat and stared blankly at a voluble James, prattling away about things which didn't matter. He found himself even admiring things about him: the way he could bite pull-bread, for instance; the relish he had for his food. But all this chatter! He was too uncomfortable to see that James's present relish was chiefly for that. The Stilton and biscuits, the glass of port were but salt to the handling of Jimmy Urquhart; for James was a good fighter when he had a good man against him.

His parting words were these: "Now I shouldn't be surprised if she found herself out of conceit with this beano before we start. She's like that, you know. In such a case it's up to you to do something. You and Lancelot between you. That's an irresistible pair. I defy a gentlewoman, and a mother, to lose heart. Come in when you can. Tell us tales of far Cashmere. Sing us songs of Araby. I won't promise to join in the chorus—if you have choruses; but I shall revel in my quiet way. Now don't forget. I count upon you. By-bye."

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"D— your eyes, oh, d— your eyes!" said Jimmy, shouldering the hill as he went his way.

Really, he began to lose nerve a little—and for such a sanguine man a little was much. It was as if he was on the downward slide of the wave, no longer cresting the flow, which surged on ahead of him, carrying him no longer. The fact was that he was now at the difficult part of an enterprise which had been so far too easy. At the moment it was not obvious to him what he was to do. James was aware, that was plain; and James had a strong hand—if he knew that too, he had an unassailable hand. But did he? Urquhart thought not. He chuckled grimly to himself as he saw his complacent host taken at his word. He looked at his wrist. "Half-past three? D— him, I'll go and see her now."

But Lucy, as James had truly put it, held firmly to the bank. Glad of him she certainly was, amused by his audacities; but not tempted to plunge. He saw very soon that he must be careful with her. A reference to the Hardanger woods at night, to the absence of nightingales, absence of the dark—she veiled her eyes with blankness, and finally shut down the topic. "Don't let's talk of what is not in Norway. Tell me what is there. I have to keep Lancelot supplied you know." No man has so little self-esteem as to suppose that a woman can definitely put him away. Urquhart had plenty, and preferred to think that she thrust him more deeply within her heart. "Quite right," he said, and exerted himself on her amusement. James, coming home early, found him on the hearth-rug, talking really well about his flying. Nobody could have behaved better than James. He took his cup of tea, listened, was interested, smoked a cigarette; then touched Lucy's shoulder, saying, "I leave you to your escapades." He went to his own room, with nothing to do there, and sat it out. He fought his nervousness, refused to see his spectres, sat deep in his chair, grimly smoking. He heard the drawing-room door open, Urquhart's voice: "Yes, it will be all right. Leave all that to me." Lucy said something, he could not tell what. His heart beat faster to hear her tones. Urquhart let himself out: she had not gone with him to the front door. Was that a good sign? or a bad one? He frowned over that intricate question; but kept himself from her until dinner-time. She might have come in—he half expected her; but she did not. What was she doing in there by herself? Was she thinking where she stood? So pretty as she was, so innocent, such a gentle, sweet-natured creature! Alas, alas!

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In short, James was growing sentimental about Lucy. Man of fashion as he was, with that keen eye for style and the mode, it may well be that Urquhart's interest in her was a kind of *cachet*. A hall-mark! However that may be, James looked at her more curiously during that July than he had done since he saw her first in the garden of Drem House. Yes, Lucy was pretty; more than that, she had charm. He saw it now. She moved her head about like a little bird—and yet she was not a little woman by any means; tall, rather, for a woman. But there was an absence of suspicion about Lucy—or rather of fundamental suspicion (for she was full of little superficial alarms), which was infinitely charming—but how pathetic! It was deeply pathetic; it made him vaguely unhappy, and for a long time he did not know why tears swam into his eyes as he watched her over the top of his evening paper, or was aware (at the tail of his eye) of her quick and graceful motions before her dressing-glass. Studying his feelings deeply, as never before, he found himself out. It was that he was to lose her, had perhaps lost her, just as he had found out how inexpressibly dear she was to be. And amazement came upon him, and dismay to realise that this sweetness of hers, this pliancy of temper, this strength within beauty were really there in her apart from him. As if he had believed that they lay in his esteem! No, indeed: they were her own; she could bestow them where she pleased.

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But he couldn't touch her—now: he would die sooner than touch her. And he couldn't say anything to her: that would have been to throw up the game. She should never pity him, and give him for pity what would have become, in the very giving, negligible to herself. He knew himself well: he could never ask for a thing. No! but could he get her to ask for something? Ah, then she might find out whom she had married! A man, he judged, of spendthrift generosity, a prodigal of himself. Yes, that was how it must be, if to be at all. He kept his eyes wide, and followed her every movement, with a longing to help which was incessant, like toothache. At the same time he was careful to keep himself quiet. Not a tone of voice must vary, not a daily action betray him. That hand on the shoulder, now, when Urquhart was last here. Too much. There must be no more of it, though he could still feel the softness of her in the tips of his fingers. Thus he braced himself.

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CHAPTER XVI

AMARI ALIQUID

Lingen was exceedingly gratified by Lucy's letter. James had thought the invitation should come from her, and, as the subject-matter was distasteful to her, sooner than discuss it she had acquiesced. Few pin-pricks had rankled as this one. She had never had any feeling but toleration for Lingen; James had erected him as a foible; and that he should use him now as a counter-irritant made her both sore and disgustful. She wished to throw up the whole scheme, but was helpless, because she could neither tell James, who would have chuckled, nor Urquhart either. To have told Urquhart, whether she told him her reason or left him to guess it, would have precipitated a confession that her present position was untenable. In her heart she knew it, for the heart knows what the mind stores; but she had not the courage to summon it up, to table it, and declare, "This robe is outworn, stretched at the seams, ragged at the edges. Away with it." Just now she could not do it; and because she could not do it she was trapped. James had her under his hand.

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Therefore she wrote her, "Dear Francis," and had his grateful acceptance, and his solemn elation, visible upon his best calling face. "I can't tell you how happy you have made me. It is beautiful, even for you, to make people happy. That is why you do it: what else could you do? Life is made up of illusions, I think. Let me therefore add to the sum of mine that you have desired my happiness." This sort of thing, which once had stirred her to gentle amusement, now made her words fall dry. "You mustn't forget that James has desired it too." "Oh," said Francis Lingen, "that's very kind of him."

"Really, it is Mr. Urquhart's party. He invented it."

"Did he desire my happiness too?" asked Lingen, provoked into mockery of his own eloquence by these chills upon it.

"At least he provided for it," said Lucy, "and that you shouldn't be uncomfortable I have asked Margery Dacre to come."

Lingen felt this to be unkind. But he closed his eyes and said, "How splendid."

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That was the fact. It had been an afterthought of hers, and partially countered on James. Margery Dacre also had accepted. She had said, "How too delicious!" James, when made aware that she was coming, ducked his head, it is true, but made a damaging defence.

"Is she?" he said. "Why?"

"She'll make our number a square one," she replied, "to begin with. And she might make it more pleasant for the others—Francis Lingen and Mr. Urquhart."

If she hadn't been self-conscious she would never have said such a thing as that. James's commentary, "I see," and the subsequent digestion of the remark by the eyeglass, made her burn with shame. She felt spotted, she felt reproach, she looked backward with compunction and longing to the beginning of things. There was now a tarnish on the day. Yet there was no going back.

Clearly she was not of the hardy stuff of which sinners must be made if they are to be cheerful sinners. She was qualmish and easily dismayed. Urquhart was away, or she would have dared the worst that could befall her, and dragged out of its coffer her poor tattered robe of romance. Between them they would have owned to the gaping seams and frayed edges. Then he might have kissed her—and Good-bye. But he was not at hand, and she could not write down what she could hardly contemplate saying.

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Never, in fact, was a more distressful lady on the eve of a party of pleasure. Lancelot's serious enjoyment of the prospect, evident in every line of his letters, was her only relish; but even that could not sting her answers to vivacity. "I hope the Norwegians are very sensible. They will need all their sense, because we shall have none when the pirate is there." "There used to be vikings in Norway. They came to England and stole wives and animals. Now we bring them a man for wives. That is what for with the chill of." "I must have a new reel to my fishing-rod. The old one has never been the same since I made a windlass of it for the battleship when it was a canal-boat, and it fell into the water when we made a landslide and accident which was buried for three days and had a worm in the works. Also a v. sharp knife for reindeer, etc. They are tough, I hear, and my knife is sharpest at the back since opening sardines and other tins, all rather small." He drove a fevered pen, but retained presence of mind enough to provide for his occasions: "The excitement of Norway may lose me some marks in term's order. Not many I dare say." Again, "When you are excited reports go bad. I have been shouting rather, kicking up a shine. Once there was a small fight which was twiggged. Norway is a serious matter." There was an undercurrent of nervousness, discernible only to her eyes. She could not account for it till she had him home, and they were on the edge of adventure. It was lest he should be seasick and disgrace himself in the

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esteem of young Nugent, who, as a naval officer, was of course sea-proof. "I expect Nugent likes it very rough," he said—and then, "I don't, you know, much. Not for weeks at a time. Rather a nuisance." However, it was solved in the event by Nugent being prostrate from the time they left the Tyne. Between his spasms he urged his mother to explain that Lord Nelson was always seasick. But Lancelot was very magnanimous about it.

There was diversion in much of this, and she used it to lighten her letters to Urquhart, which, without it, had been as flat as yesterday's soda-water. As the time came near when they should leave home she grew very heavy, had forebodings, wild desires to be done with it all. Then came a visitation from the clear-eyed Mabel and a cleansing of the conscience.

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Mabel said that she was sorry to miss Norway. It would have amused her enormously. "To see you in the saddle, with two led horses!" She always talked as if she was an elder sister. "I almost threw Laurence over; but of course I couldn't do that. He's so dependent and silent and pathetic—but thank goodness, he hasn't found out, like James, the real use of wives. That is, to have somebody to grumble to who really minds. There's your James for you. He doesn't want to go a bit; he'd much rather be at Harrogate or somewhere of that sort. Perhaps he'd like Homburg. But he wouldn't go for the world. He's not pathetic at all, though he wants to be; but he wants to be sarcastic at the same time, and is cross because the two things won't go together. Of course he stuck in Francis Lingen. He would. As if he cared about Francis Lingen, a kind of poodle!"

"You oughtn't to abuse James to me," Lucy said, not very stoutly; "I don't abuse Laurence."

"Abuse him!" cried Mabel. "Good Heavens, child, I only say out loud what you are saying to yourself all day. We may as well know where we are." Then came a pause; and then, "I suppose you and Jimmy Urquhart are in a mess."

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Lucy said nothing; whereupon Mabel showed her clear sight. "And I suppose you know now who turned the light off." At that terrible surmise Lucy got up and stood above her sister. "Mabel, I don't know what to do."

"I am sure you don't," said Mabel. "On the other hand, you know what you have to do."

"Yes," Lucy replied; "but it isn't so easy as you would think. You see, I have never spoken to him about it, nor he to me; and it seems almost impossible to begin—now."

Mabel was out of her depth. "Do you mean—? What do you really mean?"

"I mean exactly what I say. I found out the truth, by a kind of accident—one day. It wasn't possible to doubt. Well, then—it went on, you know—"

"Of course it did," said Mabel. "Well?"

—"And there was no disguise about it, after there couldn't be."

"Why should there be, if there couldn't be?" Mabel was at her wits' end.

"There was no disguise about it, while it was going on, you know. But in the daytime—well, we seemed to be ordinary people, and nothing was said. Now do you see?"

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Mabel did. "It makes it very awkward for you. But feeling as you do now, you simply must have it out."

"I can't," Lucy said with conviction. "I know I can't do that. No, it must stop another way. I must—be hateful."

"Do you mean to make him dislike you? To put him off?"

Lucy nodded. "Something like that."

"Try it," said Mabel.

"You mean it won't answer?"

"I mean that *you* won't, my dear. You are not that sort. Much too kind. Now I could be perfectly beastly, if I felt it the only thing."

Lucy was in a hard stare. "I don't feel kind just now. James has given me a horror of things of the sort. I don't believe he meant it. I think he felt snappish and thought he would relieve his feelings that way. But there it is. He has made it all rather disgusting. It's become like a kind of intrigue of vulgar people, in a comedy."

"These things do when you take them out and look at them," Mabel said. "Like sham jewellery. They are all right in their cases. The velvet lining does so much. But although you may be disgusted with James's handling of your private affairs, you are not disgusted with—the other?"

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"No, I suppose not. I really don't know. He is the most understanding man in the world, and I would trust him through everything. I don't think he could tell me an untruth. Not one that mattered, anyhow. I could see him go away from me for a year, for two, and not hear a word from him, and yet be sure that he would come back, and be the same, and know me to be the same. I feel so safe with him, so proud of his liking me, so settled in life—I never felt settled before—like being in a nest. He makes everything I love or like seem more beautiful and precious—Lancelot, oh, I am much prouder of Lancelot than I used to be. He has shown me things in Lancelot which I

never saw. He has made the being Lancelot's mother seem a more important, a finer thing. I don't know how to say it, but he has simply enhanced everything—as you say, like a velvet lining to a jewel. All this is true—and something in me calls for him, and urges me to go to him. But now—but yet—all this hateful jealousy—this playing off one man against another—Francis Lingen! As if I ever had a minute's thought of Francis Lingen—oh, it's really disgusting. I didn't think any one in our world could be like that. It spots me—I want to be clean. I'd much rather be miserable than feel dirty."

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Here she stopped, on the edge of tears, which a sudden access of anger dried up. She began again, more querulously. "It's his fault, of course. It was outrageous what he did. I'm angry with him because I can't be angry with myself—for not being angry. How could I be angry? Oh, Mabel, if it had been James after all! But of course it wasn't, and couldn't be; and I should be angry with him if I wasn't so awfully sorry for him."

Mabel stared. "Sorry for James!"

"Yes, naturally. He's awfully simple, you know, and really rather proud of me in his way. I see him looking at me sometimes, wondering what he's done. It's pathetic. But that's not the point. The point is that I can't get out."

"Do you want to get out?" Mabel asked.

"Yes, I do in a way. It has to be—and the sooner the better. And whether I do or not, I don't like to feel that I can't. Nobody likes to be tied."

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"Then nobody should be married," said Mabel, who had listened to these outbursts of speech, and pauses which had been really to find words rather than breath, with staring and hard-rimmed eyes. She had a gift of logic, and could be pitiless. "What it comes to, you know," she said, "is that you want to have your fun in private. We all do, I suppose; but that can't come off in nine cases out of ten. Especially with a man like James, who is as sharp as a razor, and just as edgy. The moment anybody peers at you you show a tarnish, and get put off. It doesn't look to me as if you thought so highly of—the other as you think you do. After all, if you come to that, the paraphernalia of a wedding is pretty horrid; one feels awfully like a heifer at the Cattle Show. At least, I did. The complacency of the bridegroom is pretty repulsive. You feel like a really fine article. But one lives it down, if one means it."

Lucy told her to go, or as good as told her. Sisters may be plain with each other. She wasn't able to answer her, though she felt that an answer there was.

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What she had said was partly true. Lucy was a romantic without knowing it. So had Psyche been, and the fatal lamp should have told her so. The god removed himself. Thus she felt it to be. He seemed just outside the door, and a word, a look, would recall him to his dark beauty of presence. That he was beautiful so she knew too well, that he was unbeautiful in the glare of day she felt rather than knew. The fault, she suspected, lay in her, who could not see him in the light without the blemish of circumstance—not his, but circumstance, in whose evil shade he must seem smirched. What could she do with her faulty vision, but send him away? Was that not less dishonourable than to bid him remain and dwindle as she looked at him? What a kink in her affairs, when she must be cruel to her love, not because she loved him less, but rather that she might love him more!

But the spirit of adventure grew upon her in spite of herself, the sense of something in the wind, of the morning bringing one nearer to a great day. It pervaded the house; Crewdson got in the way of saying, "When we are abroad, we shall find that useful, ma'am"; or "Mr. Macartney will be asking for that in Norway." As for James, it had changed his spots, if not his nature. James bought marvellous climbing boots, binoculars, compasses of dodgy contrivance, sandwich-cases, drinking-flasks, a knowing hat. He read about Norway, studied a dictionary, and ended by talking about it, and all to do with it, without any pragmatism. Lucy found out how he relied upon Urquhart and sometimes forgot that he was jealous of him. Jealous he was, but not without hope. For one thing, he liked a fight, with a good man. Lingen caught the epidemic, and ceased to think or talk about himself. He had heard of carpets to be had, of bold pattern and primary colouring; he had heard of bridal crowns of silver-gilt worthy of any collector's cabinet. He also bought boots and tried his elegant leg in a flame-coloured sock. And to crown the rocking edifice, Lancelot came home in a kind of still ecstasy which only uttered itself in convulsions of the limbs, and sudden and ear-piercing whistles through the fingers. From him above all she gained assurance. "Oh, Mr. Urquhart, he'll put all that straight, I bet you—in two ticks!..." and once it was, "I say, Mamma, I wonder where you and I would be without Mr. Urquhart." James heard him, and saw Lucy catch her breath. Not very pleasant.

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CHAPTER XVII

THE SHIVERING FIT

They were to start on the 8th of August, and it was now the 5th. Packing had begun, and Crewdson, as usual, was troublesome. He had the habit of appearing before Lucy and presenting some small deficiency as a final cause of ruin and defeat. "I can't find any of the Brown Polish,

ma'am. I don't know what Mr. Macartney will do without it." This, or something like it, had become a classic in the family. It had always been part of the fun of going away. But this year Lucy was fretted by it. She supposed herself run down and whipped herself to work. She found herself, too, lingering about the house, with an affection for the familiar aspect of corners, vistas, tricks of light and shadow, which she had never thought to possess. She felt extremely unwilling to leave it all. It was safety, it was friendliness; it asked no effort of her. To turn away from its lustrous and ordered elegance and face the unknown gave her a pain in the heart. It was odd to feel homesick before she had left home; but that was the sum of it. She was homesick. Urquhart was very much in her mind; a letter of his was in her writing-table drawer, under lock and key; but Urquhart seemed part of a vague menace now, while James, though he did his unconscious utmost to defeat himself, got his share of the sunset glow upon the house. Fanciful, nervous, weary of it all as she was, she devoted herself to her duties; and then, on this fifth of August, in the afternoon, she had a waking vision, perfectly distinct, and so vivid that, disembodied and apart, she could see herself enacting it. It was followed by a shivering fit and depression; but that must tell its own tale.

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The vision occurred while she was on her knees, busied beside a trunk, turning over garments of lace and fine linen and pale blue ribbons which a maid, in the same fair attitude, was bestowing as she received them. Lancelot was out for the afternoon with Crewdson and a friend. They had gone to the Zoological Gardens, and would not be back till late. She had the house to herself; it was cool and shadowed from the sun. The Square, muffled in the heat, gave no disturbing sounds. Looking up suddenly, for no apparent reason, she saw herself with Jimmy Urquhart in a great empty, stony place, and felt the dry wind which blew upon them both. All but her own face was visible; of that she saw nothing but the sharp outline of her cheek, which was very white. She saw herself holding her hat, bending sideways to the gale; she saw her skirt cling about her legs, and flack to get free. She wondered why she didn't hold it down. The wind was a hot one; she felt that it was so. It made her head ache, and burned her cheek-bone. Urquhart was quite visible. He looked into the teeth of the wind, frowning and fretful. Why didn't she say something to him? She had a conviction that it was useless. "There's nothing to say, nothing to say." That rang in her head, like a church bell. "Nothing to say, nothing to say." A sense of desolation and total loss oppressed her. She had no hope. The vacancy, the silence, the enormous dry emptiness about her seemed to shut out all her landmarks. Why didn't she think of Lancelot? She wondered why, but realised that Lancelot meant nothing out there. She saw herself turn about. She cried out, "James! James!" started up with a sense of being caught, and saw the maid's face of scare. She was awake in a moment. "What is it, ma'am? What is it?"

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Lucy had recovered her faculties: "Nothing, Emily; it's nothing. I was giddy." But she was shivering and couldn't go on. "I think I'll lie down for a minute," she said, and asked for the aspirin. She took two tabloids and a sip of water, was covered up and left to herself. Emily tiptoed away, full of interest in the affair.

The shivering fit lasted the better part of an hour. Lucy crouched and suffered, open-eyed but without any consciousness. Something had happened, was happening still; a storm was raging overhead; she lay quaking and waited for it to pass. She fell asleep, slept profoundly, and awoke slowly to a sense of things. She had no doubt of what lay immediately before her. Disrelish of the Norwegian expedition was now a reasonable thing. Either it must be given up, or the disaster reckoned with. *Adviennne que pourra*. But in either case she must "have it out" with James. What did that mean? Jimmy Urquhart would be thrown over. He would go—and she would not. She lay, picturing rather than reasoning; saw him superbly capable, directing everything. She felt a pride in him, and in herself for discovering how fine he was. His fineness, indeed, was a thing shared. She felt a sinking of the heart to know that she could not be there. But the mere thought of that sickened her. Out of the question.

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She must "have it out" with James. That might be rather dreadful; it might take her where she must refuse to go—but on the whole, she didn't think it need. The certainty that she couldn't go to Norway, that James must be made to see it, was a moral buttress. Timidity of James would not prevail against it. Besides that, deeply within herself, lay the conviction that James was kind if you took him the right way. He was irritable, and very annoying when he was sarcastic; but he was good at heart. And it was odd, she thought, that directly she got into an awkward place with a flirtation, her first impulse was to go to James to get her out. In her dream she had called to him, though Urquhart had been there. Why was that?

She was thinking now like a child, which indeed she was where such matters were concerned. She was not really contrite for what she had done, neither regretted that she had done it, nor that it was done with. She wanted to discharge her bosom of perilous stuff. James would forgive her. He must not know, of course, what he was forgiving; but—yes, he would forgive her.

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At six or thereabouts, listening for it, she heard the motor bring James home; she heard his latch-key, and the shutting of the door behind him. Her heart beat high, but she did not falter. He was reading a letter in the hall when she came downstairs; he was very much aware of her, but pretended not to be. She stood on the bottom stair looking at him with wide and fixed eyes; but

he would not look up. He was not just then in a mood either to make advances or to receive them. His grievance was heavy upon him.

"James," said Lucy, "I've been listening for you."

"Too good," said he, and went on with his letter.

"I wanted to tell you that I don't think—that I don't much want to go to Norway."

Then he did look up, keenly, with a drawn appearance about his mouth, showing his teeth. "Eh?" he said. "Oh, absurd." He occupied himself with his letter, folding it for its envelope, while she watched him with a pale intensity which ought to have told him, and perhaps did tell him, what she was suffering.

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"I don't think you should call me absurd," she said. "I was never very certain of it."

"But, my dearest child, you made me certain, at any rate," he told her. "You made everybody certain. So much so that I have the tickets in my pocket at this moment."

"I'm very sorry. I could pay for mine, of course—and I'm sure Vera would look after Lancelot. I wouldn't disappoint him for the world."

"What are you going to tell Urquhart?" said James. Her eyes paled.

"I believe that he would take it very simply," she said. James plunged his hands into his pockets. He thought that they were on the edge of the gulf.

"Look here, Lucy," he said; "hadn't you better tell me something more about this? Perhaps you will come into the library for a few minutes." He led the way without waiting for her, and she stood quaking where she was.

She was making matters worse: she saw that now. Naturally she couldn't tell James the real state of the case, because that would involve her in history. James would have to understand that he had been believed to have wooed her when he had done nothing of the kind. That was a thing which nothing in the world would bring her to reveal to him. And if she left that out and confined herself to her own feelings for Urquhart—how was all that to be explained? Was it fair to herself, or to Urquhart, to isolate the flowering of an affair unless you could show the germinating of it? Certainly it wasn't fair to herself—as for Urquhart, it may be that he didn't deserve any generous treatment. She knew that there was no defence for him, though plenty of excuse—possibly. No—she must go through with the Norway business. Meantime James was waiting for her.

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She stood by the library table while James, back to the fireplace, lifted his head and watched her through cigar-smoke. He had no mercy for her at this moment. Suspicions thronged his darkened mind. But nothing of her rueful beauty escaped him. The flush of sleep was upon her, and her eyes were full of trouble.

"It isn't that I have any reason which would appeal to you," she told him. She faltered her tale. "I think I have been foolish—I know that I'm very tired and worried; but—I have had presentiments."

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James clicked his tongue, which he need not have done—as he knew very well. But he had not often been arbiter of late.

"My child," he said, "really—" and annoyed her.

"Of course you are impatient. I can't help it, all the same. I am telling you the truth. I don't know what is going to happen. I feel afraid of something—I don't know what—"

"Run down," said James, looking keenly at her, but kindly; "end of the season. Two days at sea will do the job for you. Anyhow, my dear, we go." He threw himself in his deep chair, stretched his legs out and looked at Lucy.

She was deeply disappointed; she had pictured it so differently. He would have understood her, she had thought. But he seemed to be in his worst mood. She stood, the picture of distressful uncertainty, hot and wavering; her head hung, her hand moving a book about on the table. To his surprise and great discomfort he now discerned that she was silently crying. Tears were falling, she made no effort to stop them, nor to conceal them. Her weakness and dismay were too much for her. She accepted the relief, and neither knew nor cared whether he saw it.

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James was not hard-hearted unless his vanity was hurt. This was the way to touch him, as he was prepared to be touched. "My child," he said, "why, what's the matter with you?" She shook her head, tried to speak, failed, and went on crying.

"Lucy," said James, "come here to me." She obeyed him at once.

Something about her attitude moved him to something more than pity. Her pretty frock and her refusal to be comforted by it; her youthful act—for Lucy had never yet cried before him; her flushed cheeks, her tremulous lips—what? If I could answer the question I should resolve the problem of the flight of souls. He looked at her and knew that he desired her above all things. A Lucy in tears was a new Lucy; a James who could afford to let his want be seen was a new James. That which stirred him—pity, need, desire, kindness—vibrated in his tones. To hear was to obey.

He took her two hands and drew her down to his knee. He made her sit there, embraced her with

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his arm. "There, my girl, there," he said; "now let me know all about it. Upon my soul, you are a baffling young woman. You will, and you won't; and then you cry, and I become sentimental. I shall end by falling in love with you."

At these strange words she broke down altogether, and sobbed her soul out upon his shoulder. Again he assured himself that he had never seen her cry before. He was immensely touched by it, and immensely at his ease too. His moral status was restored to him. He knew now what he wanted. "You poor little darling, I can't bear to see you cry so. There then—cry away, if it does you good. What does me good is to have you here. Now what made you so meek as to come when I called you? And why weren't you afraid that I should eat you up? So I might, Lucy, you know; for you've made me madly in love with you."

It seemed to her beating heart that indeed he was. He held her very close, kissed her wet cheeks, her wet eyes and her lips. She struggled in his embrace, but not for long. She yielded, and returned his kisses. So they clung together, and in the silence, while time seemed to stand still, it really did nothing of the kind; for if he gained experience she lost it. [Pg 220]

He must have grown more experienced, for he was able to return without embarrassment to the affairs so strangely interrupted. She must have grown less so, because she answered him simply, like a child. He asked her what had upset her, and she told him, a dream. A dream? Had she been asleep? No, it was a waking dream. She told him exactly what it was. She was with Mr. Urquhart in a horrible place—a dry, sandy place with great rocks in it. "And where did I come in?" "You didn't come in. That was why I called you." "You called for me, did you? But Urquhart was there?" "Yes, I suppose he was still there. I didn't look." "Why did you call for me, Lucy?" "Because I was frightened." "I'm grateful to you for that. That's good news to me," he said; and then when he kissed her again, she opened her eyes very wide, and said, "Oh, James, I thought you didn't care for me any more."

James, master of himself, smiled grimly. "I thought as much," he said; "and so you became interested in somebody else?" [Pg 221]

Lucy sat up. "No," she said, "I became interested in you first."

That beat him. "You became interested in *me*? Why? Because I didn't care for you?"

"No," she said sharply; "no! Because I thought that you did."

James felt rather faint. "I can't follow you. You thought that I didn't, you said?" Lucy was now excited, and full of her wrongs.

"How extraordinary! Surely you see? I had reason to think that you cared for me very much—oh, very much indeed; and then I found out that you didn't care a bit more than usual; and then—well, then—" James, who was too apt to undervalue people, did not attempt to pursue the embroilment. But he valued her in this melting mood. He held her very close.

"Well," he said, "and now you find that I do care—and what then?"

She looked at him, divinely shy. "Oh, if you really care—"

This would have made any man care. "Well, if I really do—?"

"Ah!" She hid her face on his shoulder. "I shall love to be in Norway." [Pg 222]

James felt very triumphant; but true to type, he sent her upstairs to dress with the needless injunction to make herself look pretty.

Presently, however, he stood up and stared hard at the ground. "Good Lord!" he said. "I wonder what the devil—" Then he raised his eyebrows to their height. "This is rather interesting."

The instinct was strong in him to make her confess—for clearly there was something to be known. But against that several things worked. One was his scorn of the world at large. He felt that it was beneath him to enquire what that might be endeavouring against his honour or peace. Another—and a very new feeling to him—was one of compassion. The poor girl had cried before him—hidden her face on his shoulder and cried. To use strength, male strength, upon that helplessness; to break a butterfly on a wheel—upon his soul, he thought he couldn't do it.

And after all—whether it was Lingen or Urquhart—he was safe. He knew he was safe because he wanted her. He knew that he *could* not want what was not for him. That was against Nature. True to type again, he laughed at himself, but owned it. She had been gone but five or ten minutes, but he wanted to see her again—now. He craved the sight of that charming diffidence of the woman who knows herself desired. He became embarrassed as he thought of it, but did not cease to desire. Should he yield to the whim—or hold himself...? [Pg 223]

At that moment Lancelot was admitted. He heard him race upstairs calling, "Mamma, Mamma! frightfully important!" That decided the thing. He opened his door, listening to what followed. He heard Lucy's voice, "I'm here. You can come in..." and was amazed. Was that Lucy's voice? She was happy, then. He knew that by her tone. There was a lift in it, a *timbre*. Was it just possible, by some chance, that he had been a damned fool? He walked the room in some agitation, then

went hastily upstairs to dress.

Whether to a new James or not, dinner had a new Lucy to reveal; a Lucy full of what he called "feminine charm"; a Lucy who appealed to him across the table for support against a positive Lancelot; who brought him in at all points; who was concerned for his opinion; who gave him shy glances, who could even afford to be pert. He, being essentially a fair-weather man, was able to meet her half-way—no more than that, because he was what he was, always his own detective. The discipline which he had taught himself to preserve was for himself first of all.

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Lancelot noticed his father. "I say," he said, when he and Lucy were in the drawing-room, "Father's awfully on the spot, isn't he? It's Norway, I expect. Bucks him up."

"Norway is enough to excite anybody," Lucy said—"even me."

"Oh, you!" Lancelot was scornful. "Anything would excite you. Look at Mr. Urquhart."

Lucy flickered. "How do you mean?" Lancelot was warm for his absent friend.

"Why, you used to take a great interest in all his adventures—you know you did."

This must be faced. "Of course I did. Well—?"

"Well," said Lancelot, very acutely, "now they seem rather ordinary—rather chronic." *Chronic* was a word of Crewdson's, used as an augmentive. Lucy laughed, but faintly.

"Yes, I expect they are chronic. But I think Mr. Urquhart is very nice."

"He's ripping," said Lancelot, in a stare.

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James in the drawing-room that evening was studiously himself, and Lucy fought with her restlessness, and prevailed against it. He was shy, and spun webs of talk to conceal his preoccupations. Lucy watched him guardedly, but with intense interest. It was when she went upstairs that the amazing thing happened.

She stood by him, her hand once more upon his shoulder. He had his book in his hand.

"I'm going," she said. "You have been very sweet to me. I don't deserve it, you know."

He looked up at her, quizzing her through the detested glass. "You darling," he said calmly, and she thrilled. Where had she heard that phrase? At the *Walküre*!

"You darling," he said; "who could help it?"

"Oh, but—" she pouted now. "Oh, but you can help it often—if you like."

"But, you see, I don't like. I should hate myself if I thought that I could."

"Do let me take your glass away for one minute."

"You may do what you please with it, or me."

The glass in eclipse, she looked down at him, considering, hesitating, choosing, poised. "Oh, I was right. You look much nicer without it. Some day I'll tell you."

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He took her hand and kept it. "Some day you shall tell me a number of things."

She did not cease to look at him, but he saw fear in her eyes. "Some day, perhaps, but not yet."

"No," said he, "not yet—perhaps."

"Will you trust me?"

"I always have."

She sighed. "Oh, you are good. I didn't know how good." Then she turned to go. "I told you I was going—and I am. Good night."

He put his book down. She let his eyeglass fall. He drew her to his knee, and looked at her.

"It's not good night," he said. "That's to come."

She gave him a startled, wide look, and then her lips, before she fled.

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CHAPTER XVIII

THE HARDANGER

That enchanted land of sea and rock, of mountains rooted in the water, and water which pierces the secret valleys of the mountains, worked its spell upon our travellers, and freed them from themselves for a while. For awhile they were as singleminded as the boys, content to live and breathe that wine-tinctured air, and watch out those flawless days and serene grey nights. London had sophisticated some of them almost beyond redemption: Francis Lingen was less man

than sensitive gelatine; James was the offspring of a tradition and a looking-glass. But the zest and high spirits of Urquhart were catching, and after a week Francis Lingen ceased to murmur to ladies in remote corners, and James to care whether his clothes were pressed. Everybody behaved well: Urquhart, who believed that he possessed Lucy's heart, James, who knew now what he possessed, Vera Nugent, who was content to sit and look on, and Lucy herself, who simply and honestly forgot everything except the beauty of the world, and the joy of physical exertion. She had been wofully ill on the passage from Newcastle and had been invisible from beginning to end. But from the moment of landing at Bergen she had been transformed. She was now the sister of her son, a wild, wilful, impetuous creature, a nymph of the heath, irresponsible and self-indulgent, taking what she could get of comfort and cherishing, and finding a boundless appetite for it. It was something, perhaps, to know in her heart that every man in the party was in love with her; it was much more—for the moment at least—to be without conscience in the matter. She had put her conscience to sleep for once, drugged it with poppy and drowsy syrups, and led the life of a healthy and vigorous animal.

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Urquhart enjoyed that; he was content to wait and watch. For the time James did not perceive it. The beauty and freshness of this new world was upon him. Francis Lingen, born to cling, threw out tentative tendrils to Margery Dacre.

Margery Dacre was a very pretty girl; she had straw-coloured hair and a bright complexion. She wore green, especially in the water. Urquhart called her Undine, and she was mostly known as the Mermaid. She had very little mind, but excellent manners; and was expensive without seeming to spend anything. For instance, she brought no maid, because she thought that it might have looked ostentatious, and always made use of Lucy's, who didn't really want one. That was how Margery Dacre contrived to seem very simple.

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For the moment Urquhart took natural command. He knew the country, he owned the motor-boat; he believed that he owned Lucy, and he believed that James was rather a fool. He thought that he had got the better of James. But this could not last, because James was no more of a fool than he was himself, though his intelligence worked in a different way. Things flashed upon Urquhart, who then studied them intensely and missed nothing. They dawned on James, who leisurely absorbed them, and allowed them to work out their own development.

It was very gradually now dawning upon James that Urquhart had assumed habits of guidance over Lucy and was not aware of any reason why he should relinquish them. He believed that he understood her thoroughly; he read her as a pliant, gentle nature, easily imposed upon, and really at the mercy of any unscrupulous man who was clever enough to see how she should be treated. He had never thought that before. It was the result of his cogitations over recent events. So while he kept his temper and native jealousy under easy control, he watched comfortably—as well he might—and gained amusement, as he could well afford to do, from Urquhart's marital assumptions. When he was tempted to interfere, or to try a fall with Urquhart, he studiously refrained. If Urquhart said, as he did sometimes, "I advise you to rest for a bit," James calmly embraced the idea. If Urquhart brought out a cloak or a wrap and without word handed it to her, James, watching, did not determine to forestall him on the next occasion. And Lucy, as he admitted, behaved beautifully, behaved perfectly. There were no grateful looks from her, such as he would expect to see pass between lovers. Keenly as he watched her, he saw no secret exchange. On the other hand, her eyes frequently sought his own, as if she wanted him to understand that she was happy, as if, indeed, she wanted him to be happy by such an understanding. This gave him great pleasure, and touched him too. If he had been capable of it, he would have told her; but he was not. It was part of his nature to treat those whom he loved *de haut en bas*. He found that it was so, and hated himself for it. The one thing he really grudged Urquhart was his simplicity and freedom from ulterior motive. Urquhart was certainly able to enjoy the moment for the moment's worth. But James must always be calculating exactly what it was worth, and whether to be enhanced by what might follow it.

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He was kinder to her than he had ever been before. In fact, he was remarkably interesting. She told him of it in their solitary moments of greatest intimacy. "This is my honeymoon," she said, "and I never had one before."

"Goose," said he, "don't attempt to deceive me." But she reasserted it.

"It's true, James. You may have loved me in your extraordinary way, but I'm sure I didn't love you. I was much too frightened of you."

"Well," he laughed, "I don't discover any terrors now." She wouldn't say that there were none. So far as she dared she was honest.

"We aren't on an exact equality. We never shall be. But we are much nearer. Own it."

He held her closely and kissed her. "You are a little darling, if that's what you mean."

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"Oh, but it isn't; it isn't at all what I mean. Why, you wouldn't call me 'little' if you didn't know you were superior. Because I'm rather tall for a woman."

He knew that she was right, and respected her for the discernment. "My love," he said, "I'm a self-centred, arrogant beast, and I don't like to think about it. But you'll make something of me if you think it worth while. But listen to me, Lucy. I'm going to talk to you seriously." Then he whispered in her ear: "Some day you must talk to me." He could feel her heart beat, he could feel her shiver as she clung.

"Yes," she said very low; "yes, I promise—but not now."

"No," he said, "not now. I want to be happy as long as I can." She started away, and he felt her look at him in the dark.

"You'll be happier when I've told you," she said.

"Why do you say that?"

"Because I shall be happier myself then," she said; and James hoped that she was right about him. One thing amazed him to discover—how women imputed their own virtues to the men they loved. It struck him a mortal blow to realise that his evident happiness would give Lucy joy, whereas hers would by no means necessarily add to his. "What does give me happiness, then?" he asked himself; "what could conceivably increase my zest for life? Evidence of power, exercise of faculty: so far as I know, nothing else whatever. A parlous state of affairs. But it is the difference, I presume, between a giving creature and a getting one which explains all. Is a man, then, never to give, and be happy? Has he ever tried? Is a woman not to get? Has she ever had a chance of it?" He puzzled over these things in his prosaic, methodical way. One thing was clear to everybody there but Urquhart in his present fatuity: Lucy was thriving. She had colour, light in her eyes, a bloom upon her, a dewiness, an auroral air. She sunned herself like a bird in the dust; she bathed her body, and tired herself with long mountain and woodland walks. When she was alone with her husband she grew as sentimental as a housemaid and as little heedful of the absurd. She grew young and amazingly pretty, the sister of her son. It would be untrue to say that, being in clover, she was unaware of it. For a woman of one-and-thirty to have her husband for a lover, and her lover for a foil, is a gift of the gods. So she took it—with the sun and green water, and wine-bright air. Let the moralists battle it out with the sophists: it did her a world of good.

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CHAPTER XIX

THE MOON-SPELL

Macartney fell easily into habits, and was slow to renounce them. Having got into the way of making love to his wife, he by no means abandoned it; at the same time, and in as easy a fashion, it came to be a matter of routine with him to play piquet with Vera Nugent after dinner. It was she who had proposed it, despairing of a quartette, or even of a trio, for the Bridge which was a dram to her. Here also James would have been only too happy; but nobody else would touch it. Lucy never played cards; Urquhart, having better things to do, said that he never did. Margery Dacre and Lingen preferred retirement and their own company. Lingen, indeed, was exhibiting his heart to the pale-haired girl as if it was a specimen-piece. "I am really a very simple person," he told her, "one of those who, trusting once, trust for ever. I don't expect to be understood, I have no right to ask for sympathy. That would be too much to look for in a jostling, market-day world like ours. But I cherish one or two very fragrant memories of kindnesses done. I open, at need, a drawer; and, like the scent of dry rose-leaves, or lavender, a sweet hint steals out that there are good women in the world, that life is not made up of receipted bills. Don't you understand the value of such treasures? I am sure that you do. You always seem to me so comprehending in your outlook." Margery said that she hoped she was.

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It was Lucy's business immediately after dinner to see that Lancelot was decently abed. The lad took the last ounce out of himself before that time came, and was to be brought by main force to the bath, crimson to the roots of his hair and dripping with sweat. Protesting to the uttermost, still panting with his final burst in the open, she saw to it that he was quiet before she could be so herself. Then she was free, and Urquhart found—or looked for—his chance. The woods called her, the wondrous silver-calm of the northern night. She longed to go; but now she dreaded Urquhart, and dared not trust herself. It had come to this, that, possessed as she was, and happy in possession, he and all that he stood for could blot the whole fair scene up in cold fog. That was how she looked at it in the first blush of her new life.

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He didn't understand that; but he saw that she was nervous, and set himself to reassure her. He assumed his dryest tone, his most negligent manner. When she came downstairs from Lancelot, and after watching the card-players, fingering a book or magazine, drifted to the open window and stood or leaned there, absorbing the glory of the night—Urquhart left her, and pulled at his pipe. When she spoke to the room at large—"Oh, you stuffy people, will you never understand that all the world is just out here?" he was the first to laugh at her, though he would have walked her off into that world of magic and dream, straight from the window where she stood. He was a wild idealist himself, and was sure of her. But he must wait her good time.

Often, therefore, she drifted out by herself, and he suffered damnably. But she never went far—he comforted himself with that assurance. "She has the homing instinct. She won't go without me; and she knows that I can't come—but oh, to be kissing her under those birches by the water's edge!"

He was not the only one who was aware that she had flitted. Macartney was always intensely aware of it, and being by this time exceedingly fond, it tended to spoil his play. So long as Urquhart left her alone he was able to endure it.

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Then came an evening when, tending to the open door, she found Urquhart there before her. He had behaved so admirably that her fears were asleep. He acted with the utmost caution, saying just enough, with just enough carelessness of tone, to keep her unsuspecting. The boreal lights were flashing and quivering in the sky: very soon he saw her absorbed in the wonder and beauty of them. "A night," she said, "when anything might happen!"

"Yes, it looks like that," he agreed. "But that is not what enraptures you."

"What do you think enraptures me?" she wished to know.

"The certainty," he replied, "that nothing will."

She waited a while, then said, "Yes, you are right. I don't want anything else to happen."

"You have everything you want, here in the house. Safe to hand! Your Lancelot in bed, your James at cards, and myself at the window. Wonderful! And you are contented?"

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"Yes, yes. I ask so little, you see. But you despise me for it."

"God forbid. I promised you that you shouldn't repent this trip. And you don't, I hope?"

Her eyes were wide open and serious. "No, indeed. I never expected to be so happy as this. It never happened to me before." She had no compunctions at all—but he was in the fatuous stage, drugged by his own imaginings.

"That's good. Shall we go down to the water?"

"I think we might," she said, not daring to look back into the room, lest he should think that she feared him.

They strolled leisurely through the wood, she in a soft rapture of delight at the still grey beauty of the night; Urquhart in a state of mind bordering upon frenzy. He gripped himself by both hands to make sure of the mastery. What gave him conviction was his constant sense of Lucy's innocence. This beautiful woman had the heart of a child and the patience of the mother of a god. To shock the one or gibe at the other were a blasphemy he simply couldn't contemplate. What then was to be the end of it? He didn't know; he didn't care. She loved him, he believed; she had kissed him, therefore she must love him. Such women don't give their lips without their hearts. But then she had been scared, and had cried off? Well, that, too, he seemed to understand. That was where her sense of law came in. He could not but remember that it would have come in before, had she known who her lover was. As things fell out, she slipped into love without knowing it. The moment she had known it, she withdrew to the shadow of her hearth. That was his Lucy all over. *His* Lucy? Yes, for that wasn't the Solicitor's Lucy—if, indeed, the solicitor had a Lucy. But had he? A little weakness of Urquhart's was to pride himself on being a man of whims, and to suppose such twists of the mind his unique possession. All indeed that he had of unique was this, that he invariably yielded to his whims; whereas other people did not.

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However, he set a watch upon himself on this night of witchery, and succeeded perfectly. They talked leisurely and quietly—of anything or nothing; the desultory, fragmentary interjections of comment which pass easily between intimates. Lucy's share was replete with soft wonderings at the beauty of the world. Neither of them answered the other.

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Under the birch-trees it was light, but very damp. He wouldn't allow her to stop there, but bade her higher up the hillside. There were pines there which were always dry. "Wait you there," he said; "I'm going back to get you a wrap." She would have stopped him, but he had gone.

Urquhart, walking up sharply to the house, was not at all prepared for Macartney walking as sharply down from it. In fact, he was very much put out, and the more so because from the first James took the upper hand.

"Hulloa," said the lord of the eyeglass.

"Hulloa, yourself," said Urquhart, and stopped, which he need not have done, seeing that Macartney with complete nonchalance continued his walk.

"Seen my wife anywhere?" came from over his shoulder. Urquhart turned on his heels. "Yes," he said, and walked on.

There was an end of one, two and three—as the rhyme goes. Urquhart was hot with rage. That bland, blundering fool, that glasshouse, that damned supercilious ass: all this and more he cried upon James. He scorned him for his jealousy; he cursed him for it; he vowed that he would carry her off before his very eyes. "Let her give the word, lift an eyebrow, and I take her across the world." And the lad too, bless him. What did the quill-driver want of them but credit? Damn him, he hung them up in his house, as tradesmen use the royal arms. He baited for his deans and chapters with them. He walked far into the night in a passion of anger. It never once occurred to him that James was a rival. And there he was right.

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He thought that Urquhart had certainly been with Lucy; he knew that he was in love with her; but oddly enough that stimulated instead of quelled him. It enhanced her. It made her love worth

keeping. He had a great respect, in his heart of hearts, for Urquhart's validity in a world of action which certainly comprehended the taking and keeping of hearts. Now he came to think of it, he must confess that he had never loved Lucy as he did now until he had observed that so redoubtable a champion was in the lists against him. Odd thing! He had been jealous of Francis Lingen, as he now was of Urquhart; but it was the latter jealousy which had made him desire Lucy. The former had simply disgusted him, the latter had spurred him to rivalry—and now to main desire. James was no philosopher; he had an idle mind except in the conduct of his business. He could not attempt, then, to explain his state of mind—but he was very much interested. Soon he saw her in the dusk under the pines: a slim white shape, standing with one hand upon the trunk of a tree. Her back was towards him; she did not turn.

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She supposed that it was Urquhart come back, and was careful not to seem waiting for him. "How quick you have been!" she said lightly, and stood where she was. No answer was returned. Then came a shock indeed, and her head seemed to flood with fear. Two hands from behind her covered her eyes; her head was drawn gently back, and she was kissed ardently on the lips. She struggled wildly; she broke away. "Oh!" she said, half sobbing. "Oh, how cruel you are—how cruel! How could you dare to do it?" And then, free of the hands, she turned upon Urquhart—and saw James. "Oh, my love!" she said, and ran to him and broke into tears.

James had secured his eyeglass, but now let it drop. He allowed her to cry her fill, and then made the best of a rather bad business. "If every man who kissed his wife," said he, "was answered like that, lips would go dry."

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She said through her tears, "You see, I thought you were Mr. Urquhart with my wrap."

"Oh, the dickens you did," said James. "And is that how Mr. Urquhart usually brings you a wrap?"

She clung to him. "Well, no. If he did, I suppose I shouldn't have been so angry—by this time."

"That's a very good answer," James allowed. "I'll only make one comment upon it. You cried out upon the cruelty of the attack. Now if it had been—assume it for the moment—our—well, friend, let us say, why would it have been cruel of him? Shameful, flagrant, audacious, impudent, insolent, all that I can understand. But cruel, Lucy?"

Lucy's cheek was upon his shoulder, and she let it stay there, even while she answered. The moment was serious. She must tell him as much as she dared. Certain things seemed out of the question; but something she must tell him.

"You see, James," she said, "I think Mr. Urquhart is fond of me—in fact, I'm sure of it—"

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"Has he told you so?"

"Not in so many words—but—"

"But in so many other words, eh? Well, pursue."

"And I told him that I couldn't possibly join the party—on that account."

"Did you tell him it was on that account?"

"No," said Lucy, "I didn't; but he understood that. I know he understood it, because he immediately said that if I would come I shouldn't repent it. And I haven't. He has never made me feel uncomfortable. But just now—when I was expecting him—oh, it seemed to me quite horrible—and I was furious with him."

"You were indeed. It didn't occur to you that it might have been—well, somebody with more right."

Her arm tightened, but she said nothing. The unconscious James went on. "I was wrong. A man has no right to kiss a woman unawares—in the dark. Even if it's his wife. She'll always want to know who it was, and she's bound to find out. And he'll get no thanks for it, either." Then it became necessary for Lucy to thank him.

"Mind you, my dear," he told her. "I have no quarrel with Jimmy Urquhart up to now. You say he's in love with you, and I think that he is. I've thought so for some time, and I confess that I didn't relish the idea that he should be out here with us. But since we are in for confessions I'll make one more. If he hadn't been in love with you I don't believe that I should be—as I am now."

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Lucy laughed—the laugh of a woman rich. "Then I'm very much obliged to him," she said.

But Urquhart was harder to convince than James.

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CHAPTER XX

FAIR WARNING

Vera Nugent, a brisk woman of the world, with a fondness for vivid clothing and a Spanish air which went oddly with it, took the trouble one fine day to tackle her brother. "Look here, Jimmy,"

she said as they breasted a mountain pass, "are you quite sure what you are up to with these people?"

Urquhart's eyes took a chill tinge—a hard and pebbly stare. "I don't know what you mean," he said.

"Men always say that, especially when they know very well. Of course I mean the Macartneys. You didn't suppose I was thinking of the Poplolly?" The Poplolly, I regret to say, was Francis Lingen, whom Vera abhorred. The term was opprobrious, and inexact.

But Urquhart shrouded himself in ice. "Perhaps you might explain yourself," he said.

Vera was not at all sure that she would. "You make it almost impossible, you know."

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They were all out in a party, and were to meet the luncheon and the boys, who had gone round in the boat. As parties will have it, they had soon scattered. Lingen had taken Margery Dacre to himself, Lucy was with her husband. Urquhart, now he came to think of it, began to understand that the sceptre was out of his hands. The pass, worn out of the shelving rock by centuries of foot-work, wound itself about the breasting cliffs like a scarf; below them lay the silver fiord, and upon that, a mere speck, they could see the motor-boat, with a wake widening out behind her like parallel lines of railway.

Urquhart saw in his mind that he would be a fool to quarrel with Vera. She was not on his side, he could feel; but he didn't despair of her. One way of putting her off him forever was to allow her to think him a fool. That he could not afford.

"Don't turn against me for a mannerism, my dear," he said.

"I turn against you, if at all, for a lack of mannerism," said Vera briskly. "It's too bad of you. Here I am as so much ballast for your party, and when I begin to make myself useful, you pretend I'm not there. But I *am* there, you know."

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"I was cross," he said, "because I'm rather worried, and I thought you were going to worry me more."

"Well, maybe that I am,"—she admitted that. "But I don't like to see a sharp-faced man make a donkey of himself. The credit of the family is at stake."

He laughed. "I wouldn't be the first of us—and this wouldn't be the first time. There's whimsy in the blood. Well—out with it. Let me know the worst."

Vera stopped. "I intend to do it sitting. We've heaps of time. None of the others want us."

Urquhart hit the rock with his staff. "That's the point, my child. Do they—or don't they?"

"You believe," Vera said, "that Lucy is in love with you."

Urquhart replied, "I know that she was."

"There you have the pull over me," she answered. "I haven't either your confidence or hers. All I can tell you is that now she isn't." Urquhart was all attention. "Do you mean, she has told you anything?"

"Good Heavens," Vera scoffed, "what do you take me for? Do you think I don't know by the looks of her? If you weren't infatuated you'd know better than I do."

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"My dear girl," Urquhart said, with a straight look at her, "the fact is, I am infatuated."

"I'm sorry for you. You've made a mess of it. But I must say that I'm not at all sorry for her. Don't you suppose that she is the sort to find the world well lost for your *beaux yeux*. Far from that. She'd wilt like a rose in a window-box."

"I'd take her into fairy-land," said Urquhart. "She should walk in the dawn. She wouldn't feel her feet."

"She would if they were damp," said Vera, who could be as direct as you please. "If you think she's a wood nymph in a cage, you're very much mistaken. She's very domestic."

"I know," said the infatuate, "that I touched her." Vera tossed her head.

"I'll be bound you did. You aren't the first man to light a fire. That's what you did. You lit a fire for Macartney to warm his hand at. She's awfully in love with him."

Urquhart grew red. "That's not probable," he said.

Vera said, "It's certain. Perhaps you'll take the trouble to satisfy yourself before you take tickets for fairy-land. It's an expensive journey, I believe. Had you thought what you would be doing about Lancelot—a very nice boy?"

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"No details had been arranged," said Urquhart, in his very annoying way.

"Not even that of the lady's inclinations, it appears. Well, I've warned you. I've done it with the best intentions. I suppose even you won't deny that I'm single-minded? I'm not on the side of your solicitor." That made Urquhart very angry.

"I'm much obliged to you, my dear. We'll leave my solicitor out of account for the moment." But that nettled Vera, who flamed.

"Upon my word, Jimmy, you are too sublime. You can't dispose of people quite like that. How are you to leave him out of account, when you brought his wife into it? If you ever supposed that Macartney was nothing but a solicitor, you were never more mistaken in your life—except when you thought that Lucy was a possible law-breaker."

At the moment, and from where they stood, the sea-scape and the coast-road stood revealed before and behind them for many a league. In front it descended by sharp spirals to a river-bed. Vera Nugent standing there, her chin upon her hands, her hands upon her staff, could see straight below her feet two absorbed couples, as it were on different grades of the scene. In the first the fair Margery Dacre leaned against a rock while Lingen, on his knees, tied her shoestring; at a lower level yet Macartney, having handed his Lucy over a torrent, stooped his head to receive his tribute. Vera, who had a grain of pity in her, hoped that Urquhart had been spared; but whether he was or not she never knew. No signs of disturbance were upon him at the ensuing picnic, unless his treatment of Macartney—with a kind of humorous savagery—betrayed him. They talked of the Folgefond, that mighty snow-field beyond the fiord which the three men intended to traverse in a day or two's time.

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"Brace yourself, my friend," Urquhart said. "Hearts have been broken on that ground before now."

James said that he had made his peace with God—but Lucy looked full-eyed and serious.

"I never know when you are laughing at us," she said to Urquhart.

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"Be sure that I have never laughed at you in my life," he said across the table-cloth.

"He laughs at me," said James behind his eyeglass; "but I defy him. The man who can laugh at himself is the man I envy. Now I never could do that."

"You've hit me in a vital spot," Urquhart said. "That's my little weakness; and that's why I've never succeeded in anything—even in breaking my neck."

Lancelot nudged his friend Patrick. "Do you twig that?"

Patrick blinked, having his mouth too full to nod conveniently.

"Can't drive a motor, I suppose! Can't fly—I don't think."

"As to breaking your neck," said James, "there's still a chance for you."

"I shall make a mess of it," Urquhart retorted.

"Is this going to be a neck-breaking expedition?" That was from Lingen, who now had an object in life.

"I never said so," Urquhart told him. "I said heart-breaking—a far simpler affair."

"What is going to break your heart in it, please?" Lucy asked him. She saw that there lay something behind his rattle.

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"Well," said Urquhart, brazening it out, "it would break mine to get over the snow-field—some eight miles of it, there are—and to find that I couldn't get down. That might easily happen."

"And what would you do?"

James fixed her with his eyeglass. "That's where the neck-breaking might intervene," he said. "Jimmy would rather risk his neck any day."

"Than his heart!"

"Heart!" said Vera. "No such thing. Quite another organ. It's a case of dinner. He'd risk his neck for a dinner, and so would any man."

"I believe you are right," said James.

Lucy with very bright eyes looked from one to the other of her lovers. Each wore a mask. She determined to ask James to give up the Folgefond, discerning trouble in the air.

They went home by water, and Lancelot added his unconscious testimony. He was between Urquhart's knees, his hand upon the tiller, his mood confidential.

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"I say—" he began, and Urquhart encouraged him to say on.

—"It's slightly important, but I suppose I couldn't do the Folgefond by any chance?"

"You are saying a good deal," said Urquhart. "I'll put it like this, that by some chance you might, but by no chance in the world could Patrick."

"Hoo!" said Lancelot, "and why not, pray?"

"His mother would put her foot on it. Splosh! it would go like a cockroach."

"I know," said dreamy Lancelot. "That's what would happen to me, I expect." Then he added,

"That's what will happen to my father."

"Good cockroach," said Urquhart, looking ahead of him. "You think she won't want him to go."

Lancelot snorted. "*Won't* want him! Why, she doesn't already. And he'll do what she wants, I'll bet you."

"Does he always?"

"He always does now. It's the air, I fancy."

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CHAPTER XXI

THE DEPARTURE

But pout as she might, she could not prevail with James, whose vanity had been scratched.

"My dear girl, I'd sooner perish," he said. "Give up a jolly walk because Jimmy Urquhart talks about my heart and his own neck—preposterous! Besides, there's nothing in it."

"But, James," she said, "if I ask you—"

He kissed the back of her neck. She was before the glass, busy with her hair. "You don't ask me. You wouldn't ask me. No woman wants to make a fool of a man. If she does, she's a vampire."

"Mr. Urquhart is very impulsive," she dared to say.

"I've known that for a long time," said James. "Longer than you have, I fancy. But it takes more than impulse to break another man's neck. Besides, I really have no reason to suppose that he wants to break my neck. Why should he?"

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Here they were up against the wall again. If there were reasons, he could not know them. There was no getting over it yet. They were to start betimes in the morning, and sleep that night at Brattebö, which is the hithermost spur of the chain. Dinner and beds had been ordered at Odde, beyond the snow-field.

Dinner was a gay affair. They toasted the now declared lovers. True to his cornering instincts, Lingen had told Lucy all about it in the afternoon. "Your sympathy means so much to me—and Margery, whose mind is exquisitely sensitive, is only waiting your nod to be at your feet, with me."

"I should be very sorry to see either of you there," Lucy said. "I'm very fond of her and I shouldn't take it at all kindly if she demeaned herself. When do you think of marrying?"

He looked at her appealingly. "I must have time," he said; "time to build the nest."

"A flat, I suppose," she said, declining such poetical flights.

"A flat!" said Francis Lingen. "Really, it hadn't occurred to me."

From Lucy the news went abroad, and so the dinner was gay. Urquhart confined himself to the two boys, and told them about the Folgefond—of its unknown depth, of the crevasses, of the glacier on its western edge, of certain white snakes, bred by the snow, which might be found there. Their bite was death, he said.

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"Frost-bite," said Patrick Nugent, who knew his uncle's way; but Lancelot favoured his mother.

"Hoo!" he said. "I expect that you'd give him what for. One blow of your sword and his head would lie at your feet."

"That's nasty, too," said Urquhart. "They have white blood, I believe." Lancelot blinked.

"Beastly," he said. "Did Mamma hear you? You'd better not tell her. She hates whiteness. Secretly—so do I, rather."

It was afterwards, when the boys had gone to bed, that a seriousness fell upon those of them who were given to seriousness. James and Vera Nugent settled down squarely to piquet. Francis Lingen murmured to his affianced bride.

"I don't disguise from myself—and from you I can have no secrets—that there is danger in the walk. The snow is very treacherous at this season. We take ropes, of course. Urquhart is said to know the place; but Urquhart is—"

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"He's very fascinating," said Margery Dacre, and Francis lifted his eyebrows.

"You find that? Then I am distressed. I would share everything with you if I could. To me, I don't know why, there is something crude—some harsh note—a clangour of metal. I find him brazen—at times. But to you, my love, who could be strident? You are the very home of peace. When I think of you I think of doves in a nest."

"You must think of me to-morrow, then," said Margery. He rewarded her with a look.

Lucy, for her part, had another sort of danger in her mind. It seemed absolutely necessary to her now to speak to Urquhart, because she had a conviction that he and James had very nearly come to grips. Women are very sharp at these things. She was certain that Urquhart knew the state of her heart, just as certain as if she had told him of it. That being so, she dreaded his impulse. She suspected him of savagery, and as she had no pride where love was concerned she intended to appeal to him. Modesty she had, but no pride. She must leave great blanks in her discourse; but she trusted him to fill them up. Then there was another difficulty. She had no remains of tenderness left for him: not a filament. Unless she went warily he might find that out and be mortally offended. All this she battled with while the good-nights to Lancelot were saying upstairs. She kissed his forehead, and stood over him for a moment while he snuggled into his blankets. "Oh, my lamb, you are worth fighting for!" was her last thought, as she went downstairs full of her purpose.

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The card-players sat in the recess; the lovers were outside. Urquhart was by himself on a divan. She thought that he was waiting for her.

With a book for shield against the lamp she took the chair he offered her. "Aren't they extraordinary?" she said. He questioned.

"Who is extraordinary? Do you mean the card-sharpers? Not at all. It's meat and drink to them. It's we who are out of the common: daintier feeders."

"No," she said, "it's not quite that. James's strong point is that he can keep his feelings in separate pigeonholes. I'm simply quaking with fear, because my imagination has flooded me. But he won't think about the risks he's running—until he is running them."

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Urquhart had been looking at her until he discovered that James had his eye upon her too. He crossed his leg and clasped the knee of it; he looked fixedly at the ceiling as he spoke.

"I should like to know what it is you're afraid of," he said in a carefully literal but carefully inaudible tone. He did that sort of thing very well.

Lucy was pinching her lip. "All sorts of things," she said. "I suffer from presentiments. I think that you or James may be hurt, for instance—"

"Do you mean," said Urquhart—as if he had been saying "Where did you get this tobacco?"—"Do you mean that you're afraid we may hurt each other?"

She hung her head deeply.

"You needn't be. If you can fear that you must forget my promise." He saw her eyes clear, then cloud again before her difficulties.

"James, at least," she said, "has never done you any harm." It was awfully true. But it annoyed him. Damn James!

"None whatever," he answered sharply. "I wonder if I haven't done him any good."

Looking at her guardedly, through half-closed eyes, he saw that she was strongly moved. Her bosom rose and fell hastily, like short waves lipping a wharf. Her hands were shut tight. "You have been the best friend I ever had," she said. "Don't think I'm not grateful."

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That came better. He tapped his pipe on the ash-tray at hand. "My dear," he said, "I intend to live on your gratitude. Don't be afraid of anything. *Lascia fare a me.*" She rewarded him with a shy look. A rueful look, it cut him like a knife; but he could have screwed it round in the wound to get more of such pain. There's no more bitter-sweet torment to a man than the thanks of the beloved woman for her freedom given back to her.

He felt very sick indeed—but almost entirely with himself. For her he chose to have pity; of Macartney he would not allow himself to think at all. Danger lay that way, and he did not intend to be dangerous. He would not even remember that he was subject to whims. The thought flitted over his mind, like an angel of death, but he dismissed it with an effort. After all, what good could come of freebooting? The game was up. Like all men of his stamp, he cast about him far and wide for a line of action; for directly the Folgefond walk was over he would be off. To stay here was intolerable—just as to back out of the walk would be ignominious. No, he would go through with that somehow; but from Odde, he thought, he might send for his things and clear out. It did not occur to him that he might have to deal with Macartney. What should Macartney want that he had not? He had vindicated the law!

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But the hour was come when Macartney was to know everything. Lucy was adorable, and he simply adored her; then in the melting mood which follows she sobbed and whispered her broken confession. He had the whole story from the beginning.

He listened and learned; he was confounded, he was deeply touched. He might have been humiliated, and so frozen; he might have been offended, and so bitter; but he was neither. Her tears, her sobs, her clinging, her burning cheeks, the flood of her words, or the sudden ebb which left her speechless—all this taught him what he might be to a woman who dared give him so much. He said very little himself, and exacted the last dregs from her cup. He drank it down like a thirsty horse. Probably it was as sweet for him to drink as for her to pour; for love is a strange affair and can be its own poison and antidote.

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At the end he forgot his magnanimity, so great was his need of hers. "You have opened my eyes to my own fatuity. You have made me what I never thought I could be. I am your lover—do you know that? And I have been your husband for how long? Your husband, Lucy, and now your lover. Never let these things trouble you any more."

She clung to him with passion. "I love you," she said. "I adore you. If I've been wicked, it was to prove you good to me, and to crush me to the earth. Love me again—I am yours forever."

Later she was able to talk freely to him, as of a thing past and done. "It's very odd; I can't understand it. You didn't begin to love me until he did, and then you loved me for what he saw in me. Isn't that true?"

"I couldn't tell you," he said, "because I don't know what he did see."

"He thought I was pretty—"

"So you are—"

"He thought that I liked to be noticed—"

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"Well, and you do—"

"Of course. But it never struck you."

"No—fool that I was."

"I love you for your foolishness."

"Yes, but you didn't."

"No," she said quickly. "No! because you wouldn't allow it. You must let women love before you can expect them to be meek."

He laughed. "Do you intend to be meek?"

Then it was her turn to laugh. "I should think I did! That's my pride and joy. You may do what you like now."

He found that a hard saying; but it is a very true one.

The departure was made early. Lucy came down to breakfast, and the boys; but Margery Dacre did not appear. Vera of course did not. Noon was her time. The boys were to cross the fiord with them and return in the boat. Lucy would not go, seeing what was the matter with Urquhart.

Urquhart indeed was in a parlous frame of mind. He was very grim to all but the boys. He was to them what he had always been. Polite and very quiet in his ways with Lucy, he had no word for either of his companions. James treated him with deference; Francis Lingen, who felt himself despised, was depressed.

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"Jolly party!" said Lancelot, really meaning it, and made Urquhart laugh. But Lucy shuddered at such a laugh. She thought of the wolves in the Zoological Gardens when at sundown they greet the night. It made her blood feel cold in her veins.

"If no one's going to enjoy himself, why does anybody go?" she said at a venture. James protested that he was going to enjoy himself prodigiously. As for Lingen, he said, it would do him no end of good.

"I jolly well wish I could go," was Lancelot's fishing shot, and Lucy, who was really sorry for Urquhart, was tempted to urge it. But James would not have heard of such a thing, she knew.

Then they went, with a great deal of fuss and bustle. James, a great stickler for the conventions, patted her shoulder for all good-bye. Urquhart waited his chance.

"Good-bye, my dear," he said. "I've had my innings here. You won't see me again, I expect. I ask your pardon for many things—but I believe that we are pretty well quits. Trust me with your James, won't you? Good-bye." He asked her that to secure himself against whims.

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She could do no more than give him her hand. He kissed it, and left her. The boat was pushed out. Urquhart took the helm, with Lancelot in the crook of his arm. He turned once and waved his cap.

"There goes a man any woman could love," she told herself. If she had a regret she had it not long. "Some natural tears they shed, but dried them soon."

They made a good landing, bestowed their gear in a cart, and set out for a long climb to Brattebö, which they reached in the late afternoon—a lonely farm on the side of a naked hill. They slept there, and were to rise at four for the snow-field.

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CHAPTER XXII

CATASTROPHE

They were up and away before the light, taking only one guide with them, a sinewy, dark man with a clubbed beard on his chin. If they had had two it had been better, and Urquhart, who knew that, made a great fuss; but to no purpose. All the men were at the sæters, they were told; haymaking was in full swing out there. There was nothing to be done. Urquhart was put out, and in default of another man of sense made James his partner in griefs. "I know these chaps," he said. "When they are alone they lose their heads. The least little difficulty, they shy off and turn for home. I judge this man of ours to have the heart of a mouse. He don't want to go at all. If there are two of them they egg each other on. They talk it over. Each tries to be the bolder man."

"But is there going to be any difficulty?" James enquired, surveying the waste through his eyeglass. "I don't see why there should be."

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"You never know," Urquhart said curtly; but presently he was more confidential. "Don't tell that ass Lingen; but it might be quite difficult to get off this place."

James stared about him. "You know best. But is it harder to get off than on?"

"Of course it is, my dear chap," said Urquhart, quite in his old vein of good-tempered scorn. "We are going up on the north side, where the snow is as hard as a brick."

"Ah," said James, "now I see. And we go down on the south, where it's as soft—"

"Where it may be as soft as a bran-mash. Or blown over into cornices."

James saw, or said that he did. In his private mind he judged Urquhart of trying to intimidate him. The vice of the expert! But he noticed that the guide had a coil of rope, and that Urquhart carried a shovel.

It was easy going until near noon, with no snow to speak about. They climbed a series of ridges, like frozen waves; but each was higher than the last, and took them closer to the clouds. When they lunched under the shelter of some tumbled rocks a drifting rain blew across the desolation.

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"Jolly!" said James, but quite happily. Lingen shivered.

"My dear man," said Urquhart, "just you wait. I'll surprise you in a quarter of an hour's time." He spoke in his old way, as hectoring whom he tolerated. James noticed it, and was amused. He hadn't yet had time to be angry with this rascal; and now he began to doubt whether he should. After all, he had gained so very much more than he had lost. Honour? Oh, that be jiggered. Something too much of his own honour. Why, it was through Urquhart's attack upon Lucy that he had found out what Lucy was. Urquhart, at this time, was marching rather in front of him: James looked him over. A hardy, impudent rogue, no doubt—with that square, small head on him, that jutting chin—and his pair of blue eyes which would look through any woman born and burn her heart to water. Yes, and so he had had Lucy's heart—as water to be poured over his feet. By Heaven, when he thought of it, he, James Adolphus, had been the greater rogue: to play the Grand Turk; to hoard that lovely, quivering creature in his still seraglio; to turn the key, and leave her there! And Jimmy Urquhart got in by the window. Of course he did. He was not an imaginative man by nature; but he was now a lover and had need to enhance his mistress. How better do that than by calling himself a d—d fool (the greatest blame he knew)? It follows that if he had been a fool, Urquhart had not! Impudent dog, if you like, but not a fool. Now, for the life of him, James could not despise a man who was not a fool. Nor could he hate one whom he had bested. He did not hate Urquhart; he wasn't angry with him; he couldn't despise him. On the contrary, he was sorry for him.

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But now the miracle happened, and one could think of nothing else. As they tramped through the cold mist, over snow that was still crisp and short with frost, the light gained by degrees. The flying fog became blue, then radiant: quite suddenly they burst into the sun. The dazzling field stretched on all sides so far as the eye could see. Snow and cloud, one could not distinguish them; and above them the arch of hyaline, a blue interwoven with light, which throbbed to the point of utterance, and drowned itself in the photo-sphere. The light seemed to make the sun, to climb towards the zenith, to mass and then to burst in flame. All three men took it in, each in his fashion. Lingen was greatly moved; Urquhart became jocular.

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"Well," he said to Macartney, "what do you make of that? That's worth coming up for. That ought to extenuate a good deal." James was quick to notice the phrase.

"Oh," he said, "you can show me things. I'm very much obliged to you. This is a wonder of the world."

"Now what the deuce does he mean by that?" Urquhart thought to himself. Had Lucy told him anything? He didn't believe it. Impossible. Women don't tell.

They had seven miles of snow, pretty soft by now, and steadily up hill. They bent themselves seriously to it, and found no occasion for talk. There were crevasses—green depths of death—to be avoided. Their guide, light-eyed for scares, seemed to know them all, and reserved his alarum for signs in the sky invisible to the party. He mended the pace, which became rather severe. Francis Lingen was distressed; Macartney kept back to give him company. Urquhart forged on ahead with the guide.

By four in the afternoon one at least of them was gruelled. That was Lingen. "If we don't get down after all, it'll go hard with Poplolly," Urquhart said to James. James replied, "Oh, we must

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get down. That's all nonsense." Urquhart said nothing, and they went on.

They reached a point where their guide, stopping for a moment, looked back at them and pointed forward with his staff. "Odde is over there," he said, and Urquhart added that he knew whereabouts they were. "If it were clear enough," he told them, "you might see it all lying below you like a map; but I doubt if you'll see anything." They pushed on.

Before the last slope, which was now close at hand, the ground became very bad. The crevasses showed in every direction, raying out like cracks on an old bench. The guide was evidently anxious. He gave up all appearance of conducting his party and went off rapidly by himself. They waited for him in silence; but presently Urquhart said, "I bet you any money he won't want to go down."

"Don't he want to dine as much as we do?" said James.

"He doesn't want to break his neck," said Urquhart; "that's his little weakness."

"I sympathise with him," James said; "but I should like to know more before I turn back."

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"You'll only know what he chooses to tell you," Urquhart answered. Lingen was sitting on the snow.

The guide came back with firm steps. His eyes sought Urquhart's naturally.

"Well?" he was asked; and lifted his stock up.

"Impossible," he said.

"Why impossible?" James asked Urquhart, having none of the language, but guessing at the word.

Urquhart and the man talked; the latter was eloquent.

"He says," Urquhart told them, "that there's a great cornice, and a drop of forty feet or so. Then he thinks there's another; but he's not sure of that. He intends to go back. I knew he did before he went out to look. It's a beastly nuisance."

James looked at Lingen, who was now on his feet. "Well," he said, "what do you feel about it?"

Lingen, red in the face, said, "You'll excuse me, but I shall do what the guide proposes, though I admit to great fatigue. I don't think it would be right, under the circumstances, to do otherwise. I feel a great responsibility; but I gather that, in any case, he himself would decline to go down. You will think me timid, I dare say."

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"No, no," James said. "That's all right, of course. Personally, I should be inclined to try the first cornice anyhow. There's always a chance, you know."

Urquhart looked at him keenly. "Do you mean that?" he asked him.

"Yes," James said. "Why do you ask?" Urquhart turned away. When he faced James again he was strangely altered. His eyes were narrower; lines showed beside his mouth. Temptation was hot in the mouth. "We'd better talk about it," he said, and jerked his head sideways.

James walked with him a little way. "What's all this mystery?" he asked.

"I wonder if you know what you are doing," Urquhart said; "I wonder if you know what this means. Do you know, for instance, that I don't care a damn whether I break my neck or not, and on the whole would rather that you did than didn't? You ought to know it. But I'm asking you."

James kept his eyeglass to his eye. "I think you are talking nonsense," he said, "but I don't suppose you intend it for nonsense. You inspire me to say, taking you on your face value, that I shall try the first cornice. If it's a forty-foot drop, we ought to have rope enough."

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Urquhart peered at him. "You mean what you say?"

"Certainly I do." Urquhart turned on his heel.

"All right," he said, and went over to the other two.

"Macartney and I are going down," he said to Lingen. "I don't at all blame you for going back, but I'll trouble you to see that this man does the needful to-morrow. The needful is to come out here as early as he can get over the ground, to see if we want him. He had better fire a gun, or shout. If we are alive we shall answer him. If we don't answer, he had better see about it. I don't want to scare you, but this is not a joke, and I can't afford to be misunderstood. Now I'm going to tell him all that in his own lingo."

Lingen took it very badly; but said nothing. Urquhart spoke vehemently to the guide, who raised his staff and appeared to be testifying to Heaven. He handed over the rope, the shovel, and the kit with an air of Pilate washing his hands.

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"Now," Urquhart said to James, "we'll rope, and see if we can cut some steps through this thing. I've seen that done." James, dropping his eyeglass, said that he was in his hands. Everybody was quiet, but they were all in a hurry.

Lingen came up to say good-bye. He was very much distressed, nearly crying. The guide, on the other hand, was chafing to be off. "If that chap calls himself a guide," said Urquhart, "he ought to

be shot." The guide thereupon threw up his hands with a gesture of despair. Lingen said that he couldn't possibly go until he had seen them down. The guide, who was sullen and nervous, remained to help them. Even that seemed to be against his convictions.

They fixed one of the stocks in a crevasse; Urquhart roped. Then he went forward to the edge, or what seemed to be the edge, and having crawled on his belly so far as to be almost invisible, presently was seen to be standing up, then to fall to it with the shovel. He seemed to be cutting steps, and descending as he worked. Gradually he disappeared, and the pull on the rope began. They paid out cautiously and regularly—all seemed well. He might have had twenty feet of it; and then there was a sudden violent wrench at it, and it came back limp in Macartney's hands. [Pg 278]

"He's gone," he said. Then he shouted with all his might. No answer came. They all shouted; the echoes rang round the waste, driven back on them from the hidden mountain tops. In the deathlike hush which followed one of them thought to hear an answering cry. Lingen heard it, or thought that he did, and began to haul up the rope. When they had the end of it in their hands it was found to be cut clean. "He did that himself," James said, then added, "I'm going down. Give me out this rope—for what it's worth." To Lingen he said, "Get back as quick as you can, and bring up some men to-morrow." Then, having secured himself, he went down the flawless snow slope, and they paid out the cord as he wanted it. He had no particular sensation of fear; he knew too little about it to have any. It is imaginative men who fear the unknown. True, the rope had been cut once, and might have to be cut again. If Urquhart had had to cut, it was because it had been too short. And now it would be shorter. But there was no time to think of anything. [Pg 279]

The snow seemed to be holding him. He had got far beyond Urquhart's ledges, was upon the place where Urquhart must have slid rapidly down. All was well as yet, but he didn't want to overshoot the mark. He kept his nerve steady, and tried to work it all out in his mind. If this were really a cornice it must now be very thin, he thought. He drove at it with his staff, and found that it was so. It was little more than a frozen crust. He kicked into it with his feet, got a foothold, and worked the hole bigger. Then he could peer down into the deep, where the shadows were intensely blue. It looked a fearful drop; but he saw Urquhart lying there, and went on. He descended some ten, or perhaps fifteen feet more, and found himself dangling in the air. He was at the end of the rope then. "I'll risk it," he said, and got his knife out.

He dropped within a few yards of Urquhart.

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CHAPTER XXIII

JAMES AND JIMMY

Macartney found him lying very still; nothing, in fact, seemed to be alive but his eyes, which were wide open and missed nothing.

"You're hurt, I'm afraid. Can you tell me anything?"

Urquhart spoke in a curiously level tone. It seemed to give impartiality to what he said, as if he had been discussing the troubles of a man he hardly knew.

"Back broken, I believe. Anyhow, I can't feel anything. I'm sorry you came down after me."

"My dear fellow," said James, "what do you take me for?"

Those bright, all-seeing, steady eyes were fixed upon him. They had the air of knowing everything.

"Well, you knew what I *did* take you for, anyhow, and so it would have been reasonable—"

"We won't talk about all that," James said. "Let me cover you up with something—and then I'll see what can be done about moving you." [Pg 281]

Urquhart spoke indifferently about that. "I doubt if you can get down—and it's a good step to Odde. Four hours, I dare say."

"Yes, but there would be a house nearer than Odde. If I could get some bearers—we'd get you comfortable before dark."

"Oh, I'm comfortable enough now," Urquhart said. James thought that a bad sign.

He unpacked the rucksacks, got out the brandy-flask, a mackintosh, a sweater and a cape. "Now, my dear man, I'm going to hurt you, I'm afraid; but I must have you on a dry bed; and you must drink some of this liquor. Which will you have first?"

"The brandy," said Urquhart, "and as soon as you like."

He helped as much as he could, groaned once or twice, sweated with the effort; but the thing was done. He lay on the mackintosh, his head on a rucksack, the cape and sweater over him. Macartney went to the edge of the plateau to prospect. A billowy sea of white stretched out to a blue infinity. The clouds had lifted or been vaporised. He could see nothing of Odde; but he believed that he could make out a thread of silver, which must be the fiord. It would take him too [Pg 282]

long to get out there and back—and yet to stay here! That meant that the pair of them would die. It is but just to him to say that no alternative presented itself to him. The pair of them would die? Well, yes. What else was there? He returned. Urquhart was waiting for him, intensely awake to everything.

"Old chap," said James, "that's no go. I didn't try the snow; but I can judge distances. It's a deuce of a way down, even if there *is* a way, and—"

"It's all right," Urquhart said, "there isn't a way. I'm cornered this time. But there's just a chance for you—if you work at it. It'll begin to freeze—in fact, it has begun already. Now if you can find the shovel, you might employ yourself finely, digging a stairway. You'll be up by midnight."

"Never mind about me," James said. "I'm going to keep you warm first."

But Urquhart was fretting. He frowned and moved his head about. "No, no, don't begin that. It's not worth it—and I can't have you do it. You ought to know who I am before you begin the Good Samaritan stunt. I want to talk to you while I can. I've got a good deal to tell you. That will be better for me than anything." Jimmy was prepared for something of the kind.

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"I believe it will," he said. "Go on, then, and get it over."

It had been his first impulse to assure the poor chap that he knew all about it; but a right instinct stopped him. He would have to hear it.

So Urquhart began his plain tale, and as he got into it the contrast between it and himself became revolting, even to him. A hale man might have brazened it out with a better air. A little of the romance with which it had begun, which indeed alone made it tolerable, would have been about it still. A sicker man than Urquhart, who made a hard death for himself, would have given up the battle, thrown himself at James's feet and asked no quarter. Urquhart was not so far gone as that; a little bluster remained. He did it badly. He didn't mean to be brutal; he meant to be honest; but it sounded brutal, and James could hardly endure it.

He saw, too, as the poor chap went on, that he was getting angry, and doing himself harm. That was so. Every step he took in his narrative sharpened the edge of the fate which cut him off. He would have made a success of it if he could—but he had been really broken before he broke his back, and the knowledge exasperated him.

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So he took refuge in bluster, made himself out worse than he was, and in so doing distorted Lucy. James was in torment, remembering what he must. He felt her arms close about his neck; he felt the rush of her words: "And oh, darling, I thought it was you—of course I thought so—and I was proud and happy—that you should like me so much! I looked at myself in the glass afterwards. I thought, 'You must be rather pretty.' ..." Oh, Heaven, and this mocking, dying devil, with his triumphs!

"Say no more, man, say no more," broke from him. "I understand the rest. I have nothing to say to you. You did badly—you did me a wrong—and her too. But it's done with, and she (God bless her!) can take no harm. How can she? She acted throughout with a pure mind. She thought that you were me, and when she found that you weren't—well, well, take your pride in that. I give it up to you. Why shouldn't I? She gave you her innocent heart. I don't grudge you."

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"You needn't," said Urquhart, "since I'm a dead man. But if I had been a living one, who knows—?" He laughed bitterly, and stung the other.

"You forget one thing," said James, with something of his old frozen calm. "For all that you knew, ten minutes after you had left my house that day—the first of them—I might have benefited by your act—and you been none the wiser, nor I any the worse off. And there would have been an end of it."

Urquhart considered the point. James could have seen it working in his poor, wicked, silly mind, but kept his face away.

"Yes," Urquhart said, "you might; but you didn't." Then he laughed again—not a pleasant sound.

"Man," said James indignant, "don't you see? What robs me of utterance is that I *have* benefited by what you have done."

"It's more than you have deserved, in my opinion," Urquhart retorted. "I'll ask you not to forget that she has loved me, and doesn't blame me. And I'll ask you not to forget that it is I who am telling you all this, and not she." It was his last bite.

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The retort was easy, and would have crushed him; but James did not make it. Let him have his pitiful triumph. He was not angry any more; he couldn't be—and there was Lucy to be thought of. What would Urquhart think of a Lucy who could have revealed such things as these? He would have judged her brazen, little knowing the warm passion of her tears. Ah, not for him these holy moments. No, let him die thinking honour of her—honour according to his own code. He put his hand out and touched Urquhart's face with the back of it.

"Let us leave it at this," he said; "we both love her. We are neither of us fit. She would have taken either of us. But I came first, and then came Lancelot—and she loves the law. Put it no other way."

"The law, the law!" said the fretful, smitten man.

"The law of her nature," said James.

He felt Urquhart's piercing eyes to be upon him and schooled himself to face them and to smile into them. To his surprise he saw them fill with tears.

"You are a good chap," Urquhart said. "I never knew that before." Macartney blew his nose. [Pg 287]

No more was said, but the sufferer now allowed him to do what he would. He chafed his hands and arms with brandy; took off his boots and chafed his feet. He succeeded in getting a certain warmth into him, and into himself too. He began to be hopeful.

"I think I shall pull you through," he told him. "You ought to be a pretty hard case. I suppose you don't know how you came to fall so badly."

"Well, I do," Urquhart said.

"Don't tell me if you'd rather not."

"Oh, what does it matter now? It was a whim."

James smiled. "Another whim?"

"Yes—and another fiasco. You see, in a way, I had dared you to come."

"I admit that."

"Well, I hadn't played fair. I knew, and you didn't, that it was a bad job. You can't get down this way—not when the snow's like this."

"Oh, can't you?"

"I think not. Well, I ought to have told you. I was tempted. That's the worst thing I ever did. I ask your pardon for that." [Pg 288]

"You have it, old chap," said James.

"You can afford to be magnanimous," Urquhart snapped out fiercely. "Damn it, you have everything. But I felt badly about it as I was going down, and I thought, 'They'll feel the break, and know it's all over. So I cut the painter—do you see?'"

"Yes," said James, "I see." He did indeed see.

Urquhart began to grow drowsy and to resent interference. He was too far gone to think of anything but the moment's ease. James, on the other hand, was entirely absorbed in his patient. "I'm not going to let you sleep," he said. "It's no good making a fuss. I've got the kinch on you now." It was as much as he had. The air was biting cold, and the colder it got the more insistent on sleep Urquhart became.

James stared about him. Was this the world that he knew? Were kindly creatures moving about somewhere in it, helping each other? Was Lucy in this place? Had she lain against his heart two nights ago? Had he been so blessed? Had life slipped by—and was this the end? Which was the reality, and which the dream? If both had been real, and this was the end of men's endeavour—if this were death—if one slipped out in this cur's way, the tail between the legs—why not end it? He could sleep himself, he thought. Suppose he lay by this brother cur of his and slept? Somewhere out beyond this cold there were men by firelight kissing their wives. Poor chaps, they didn't know the end. This was the end—loneliness and cold. Yes, but you could sleep!... [Pg 289]

Suddenly he started, intent and quivering. He had heard a cry. Every fibre of him claimed life. He listened, breathlessly. Above the knocking of his own heart he heard it again. No doubt at all. He turned to Urquhart and shook him. "They are coming—they are coming—we are going to be saved!" He was violently moved; tears were streaming down his face. Urquhart, out of those still, aware, dreadfully intelligent eyes, seemed to see them coming—whoever they were. He too, and his pitiful broken members, were calling on life.

James, on his feet, shouted with might and main, and presently was answered from near at hand. Then he saw Lingen and the guide wading through the snow. "They have found us," he told Urquhart; "it's Francis Lingen and the guide. How they've done it I don't pretend to guess." [Pg 290]

"They've got around the cornice," Urquhart said. "It can be done I know." He seemed indifferent again, even annoyed again that he couldn't be allowed to sleep. James thought it a pose, this time.

Lingen, out of breath but extremely triumphant, met James.

"Thank God," he said. James with lifted brows waved his head backward to indicate the sufferer.

"He's very bad," he said. "How did you get him to come?" He meant the guide.

Flaming Lingen said, "I made him. I was desperate. I've never done such a thing before, but I laid hands on him."

"You are a brick," said James.

Lingen said, "It's something to know that you can throttle a man when you want to badly enough. I hadn't the slightest idea. It's a thing I never did before. I rather like it."

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Throttled or not, the guide saved the situation. He saved it, undisguisedly, for his own sake; for he had no zest for helping to carry a bier over the Folgefond. They made a litter of alpen-stocks and the mackintosh, and so between them carried Urquhart down the mountain. No need to dwell on it. They reached the hotel at Odde about midnight, but halfway to it they found help.

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CHAPTER XXIV

URQUHART'S APOLOGY

Macartney was right when he said to Lucy, in talking over the adventure, that Urquhart had no moral sense, though she had not then been convinced. But she was to be convinced before she had done with him.

He asked for her repeatedly, and with no regard at all to what had happened. At last he was told that if he excited himself she would leave the hotel. Vera Nugent told him that, having installed herself his nurse. Vera, who knew nothing but suspected much, guessed that Macartney had had as much of her brother as he cared about. As for Lucy, on the whole she despised her for preferring James with the Law to Jimmy without it. In this she did little justice to James's use of his advantage; but, as I say, she didn't know what had happened. All she could see for herself was that where she had once had a *faible* for Urquhart she was now ridiculously in love with her husband. Vera thought that any woman was ridiculous who fell into that position. She was not alone in the opinion.

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However, the main thing was that Jimmy shouldn't fret himself into a fever. If he kept quiet, she believed that he would recover. There was no dislocation, the doctors told her, but a very bad wrench. He must be perfectly still—and we should see.

Lucy was not told how impatiently she was awaited. James, maybe, did not know anything about it. He felt great delicacy in telling what he had to tell her of the events of that day. But she guessed nearly everything, even that Urquhart had intended to break his own neck. "He would," she said, being in a stare; "he's like that." James agreed, but pointed out that it had nearly involved his own end likewise. Lucy stared on, but said, "That wouldn't occur to him at the time." No, said James, on the contrary. It had occurred to him at the time that if he cut the rope, he, James, would immediately turn for home. She nodded her head several times. "He's like that." And then she turned and hid her face. "It's all dreadful," she said; "I don't want to know any more." It was then that James pronounced upon Urquhart's absence of morality, and found out that she was very much interested in him anyhow.

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She was curious about what had passed between him and James, for she was sure that there had been something. James admitted that. "It was very uncomfortable," he said; "I cut him as short as I could—but I was awfully sorry for him. After all, I had scored, you see."

She gave him a long look. "Yes, you scored. All ways. Because, it was only when I was angry with you that I—thought he might do." There could be no comment on that. Then she said, "I'm thankful that I told you everything before he did."

"So am I, by Jove," said James. He put his arm round her. "If you hadn't," he said, "I think I could have let him die." Lucy shook her head.

"No, you wouldn't have done that. He would have—but not you. If you had been capable of that you wouldn't have called me to come to you as you did—that day." He knew which day she meant, and felt it necessary to tell her something about it.

"On that day," he said, "though you didn't know it, I was awfully in love with you." She looked at him, wonderfully. "No, I didn't know that! What a donkey I was! But I was wretched. I simply longed for you."

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"If you hadn't cried, you would never have had me." That she understood.

"You wanted to pity me."

"No, I had been afraid of you. Your tears brought you down to earth."

"That's poetry," said Lucy.

"It's the nature of man," he maintained.

She wanted to know if he "minded" her seeing Urquhart. He did, very much; but wouldn't say so.

"You needn't mind a bit," she told him. "He has terrified me. I'm not adventurous at all; besides —"

"Besides—?"

"No, no, not now." She would say nothing more.

An expedition was made to the foot of the snow-field—for the benefit of the boys. From a distance they saw the great cornice, and the plateau where James had watched by Urquhart. Lancelot was here confronted with irony for the first time. His loyalty was severely tried. By rights Mr. Urquhart ought to have rescued the lot. Not for a moment could he doubt of that. As for his father, accepted on all hands as a hero, there were difficulties in the way which he could not get over. He had to go very warily to work because of his mother; but he went as far as he could. Why was it that Mr. Urquhart was hurt and Father was not, when they both had the same drop? Lucy could only say that Father dropped better—or fell better. And then there was a pause. "What! With an eyeglass!" He allowed himself that—with her; but with Patrick Nugent he was short and stern. Patrick had said something of the same kind, as they were journeying home together. Why hadn't Lancelot's governor smashed his eyeglass when he dropped? Lancelot sniffed offence immediately, and snorted, "Hoo! Jolly good thing for him he didn't! It kept the cold out of his eye. It's like feeding a mouse when you're a prisoner in dungeons. Afterwards it comes and gnaws the rope. Pooh, any ass could see that." And so much for Patrick and cheek.

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But the sick man, fretting in his bed, took short views. To see Lucy again had become so desirable that he could think of nothing else. She glanced before him as a Promise, and his nature was such that a Promise was halfway to a fulfilling. As strength grew, so did he wax sanguine, and amused himself by reconstructing his Spanish castle.

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Vera Nugent gave him no encouragement; and perhaps overdid it. "Hadn't you really better let the woman alone? She's perfectly happy—in spite of you." He could afford to laugh at this.

"She doesn't know what happiness is. She thinks it is safety. I could teach her better."

"You've made a great mess of it so far," Vera said. He ignored that.

"You say that she's happy. I suggest that she is merely snug. That's what a dormouse calls happiness."

"Well, there's a good deal of the dormouse in Lucy," Vera said. "If you stroke her she shines."

"Silence!" he cried sharply out. "You don't know anything at all. I have had her radiant—like a moonstone. When am I to see her?"

"I'll tell her that you want to see her—but it would be reasonable if she refused."

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"She won't refuse," he said.

James must be told, of course. He took it quietly. "Yes, on the whole—yes. I don't think you can refuse him that. It will try you."

"It will be horrid—but anyhow you know everything he can say."

"He doesn't know that I do. He'll build on that."

"Build!" said Lucy quickly. "What sort of building?"

"Oh, fantastic architecture. Bowers by Bendemeer. Never mind. Are you going?"

"Yes," said Lucy slowly. "Yes, I'll go now." She went to him and put her hands on his shoulders. Her eyes searched his face, and found it inscrutable. "You mind," she said, "I know you do. You ought not—but I'm glad of it."

He humbled himself at once. They parted as lovers part; but for the life of him he could not understand how she could find the heart to go. With himself, now, it would have been a point of honour not to go. He did not see that the more a woman loves the more love she has to spare.

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Vera Nugent took her into the room, pausing outside the door. "You'll find him very jumpy," she said; and then, "My dear, you're so sensible."

Lucy, who knew that she meant precisely the opposite, said, "No, I don't think I am. I'm excitable myself. What do you want me to do?"

"Keep cool," said Vera. "He won't like it, but it's important." Then they went in. "Jimmy, here's Mrs. Macartney."

The quick eyes from the bed had been upon her from the first. It was immediately evident to her that she was not to be spared. She heard his "At last!" and braced herself for what that might mean.

"I should have come before if the doctors had approved—so would James and Lancelot," she said

as briskly as she might. He took no notice of her addition. Vera Nugent, saying, "Don't let him talk too much," then left her with him.

She began matter-of-fact enquiries, but he soon showed her that she had not been brought in for such platitudes. He played the mastery of the invalid without hesitation.

"Oh, I'm very sick, you know. They tell me that I shall be as fit as ever I was, if I behave—but really I don't know. I've a good deal behind me—and not much before—so that I'm comparatively indifferent how the thing goes.... Look here, Lucy," he said suddenly—and she stiffened at her name—"I have to talk to you at last. It's wonderful how we've put it off—but here it has come."

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She said in low tones, "I don't see why we should talk about anything. I would much rather not. Everything is changed now—everything."

Urquhart began with a touch of asperity ill disguised. "Might one be allowed to enquire...?" Scared perhaps by his pomposity, he broke off: "No, that won't do. I'll ask you simply, what has happened? You liked me—to say no more. Now you don't. No, no, don't protest yet. Leave it at that. Well, and then there's Macartney. Macartney didn't know you existed. Now he doesn't see that any one else does. What has happened, Lucy?"

She was annoyed at his *Lucy*, annoyed that she could be annoyed, annoyed at his question, and his right to ask it—which she had given him. Mostly, perhaps, she was annoyed because her answer must sound ridiculous. Hateful, that such should be the lot of men and wives! She repeated his question, "What has happened? I don't know how to tell you. I found out, before we started—James found out— Please don't ask me to talk about it. Believe me when I say that everything is changed. I can't say more than that."

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He didn't move his eyes from her. She knew they were there though she would not face them. "Everything isn't changed. I'm not changed. I don't know that you are, although you say so." She faced him.

"Indeed, I am. I hope you'll understand that." He frowned, his fever flushed him.

"You can't be. We can never be ordinary acquaintance. I have kissed you—"

"You had no right—"

"You have kissed me—"

"You are cruel indeed."

"I am not cruel—I don't pretend to excuse myself. The first time—it was the act of a cad—but I worked it all out. It couldn't fail; I knew exactly how it would be. You would of course think it was he. You would be awfully touched, awfully pleased—set up. And you were. I saw that you were when we all came into the room. You went over and stood by him. You put your hand on his arm. I said, 'You divine, beautiful, tender thing, now I'll go through the fire to get you....'"

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Lucy had covered her face with her hands; but now she lifted it and showed him as it might be the eyes of an Assessing Angel.

"You went through no fire at all. But you put me in the fire." But he continued as if she had said nothing material.

"I had made up my mind to be satisfied. I thought if I could see you exalted, proud of what you had, that would be enough. But you found him out; and then you found me out too ... and we never spoke of it. But there it was, Lucy, all the time; and there it is still, my dear—"

Her face was aflame, but her eyes clear and cold. "No," she said, "it's not there. There is nothing there at all. You are nothing to me but a thought of shame. I think I deserve all that you can say—but surely you have said enough to me now. I must leave you if you go on with this conversation. Nothing whatever is there—"

He laughed, not harshly, but comfortably, as a man does who is sure of himself. "Yes, there is something there still. I count on that. There is a common knowledge, unshared by any one but you and me. He would have it so. I was ready to tell him everything, but he wouldn't hear me. It was honourable of him. I admired him for it; but it left me sharing something with you."

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She stared at him, as if he had insulted her in the street.

"What can you mean? How could he want to hear from you what he knew already from me?"

Urquhart went pale. Grey patches showed on his cheeks and spread like dry places in the sand.

"You told him?"

"Everything. Two nights before you went."

He fell silent. His eyes left her face. Power seemed to leave him.

"That tears it," he said. "That does for me." He was so utterly disconcerted that she could have pitied him.

"So that's why he didn't want to hear me! No wonder. But—why didn't he tell me that he knew it? I taunted him with not knowing." He turned towards her; his eyes were bright with fever. "If you

know, perhaps you'll tell me."

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Lucy said proudly, "I believe I know. He didn't want to change your thoughts of me." He received that in silence.

Then he said, "By George, he's a better man than I am."

Lucy said, "Yes, he is." Her head was very fixed, her neck very stiff. She was really angry, and Urquhart had sense enough to see it. She got up to leave him, really angry, but unwilling to appear so. "You must forget all this," she said, "and get well. Then you will do wonderful things."

He said, "I've been a blackguard; but I meant something better."

"Oh, I am sure you did," she said warmly.

"I won't see Macartney, if he doesn't mind. Tell him from me that he's a better man than I am."

"He won't believe you," said Lucy.

"Oh, yes, he will," Urquhart held. "Good-bye. Love to Lancelot."

That melted her. "Don't give us up. We are all your friends now."

He wouldn't have it. "No. I am a neck-or-nothing man. It can't be. There's no cake in the cupboard. I've eaten it. Send Vera in if you see her about. Good-bye." She left him.

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She went through the hall, with a word to Vera, who was writing letters there. "He asked for you."

Vera looked up at her. "He's excited, I suppose?"

"No, not now," said Lucy. Then she went into the sitting-room and saw the party at tea on the balcony. James paused in his careful occupations, and focussed her with his eyeglass. She went quickly to the table.

"Oh, let me do it, let me." And then she sighed deeply.

"Hulloa," said James, knowing very well. "What's up?"

She poured the tea. "Only that I'm glad to be here."

Glances were exchanged, quick but reassuring.

Lancelot said, "There's a ripping cake. Mr. Urquhart would like some, I bet you."

Lucy said, "He can't have any cake just yet." Upon which remark she avoided James's eye, and eyeglass, with great care. But on a swift afterthought she stooped and kissed Lancelot.

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EPILOGUE

Really, the only fact I feel called upon to add is the following announcement, culled from a fashionable newspaper.

"On the 3rd June," we read, "at —— Onslow Square, to Mr. and Mrs. James Adolphus Macartney, a daughter."

That ought to do instead of the wedding bells once demanded by the average reader. Let it then stand for the point of my pair's pilgrimage.

I promised a romantic James and have given you a sentimental one. It is a most unfortunate thing that it should be thought ridiculous for a man to fall in love with his wife, for his wife to fall in love with him; and we have to thank, I believe, the high romanticks for it. They must have devilry, it seems, or cayenne pepper. But I say, Scorn not the sentimental, though it be barley-sugar to ambrosia, a canary's flight to a skylark's. Scorn it not; it's the romantic of the unimaginative; and if it won't serve for a magic carpet, it makes a useful anti-macassar.

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The Macartneys saw no more of Urquhart, who, however, recovered the use of his backbone, and with it his zest for the upper air. He sent Lucy some flowers after the event of June, and later on, at the end of July, a letter, which I reproduce.

"Quid plura? I had news of you and greeted it, and am gone. I have hired myself to the Greeks for the air. I take two machines of my own, and an m. b. If you can forgive me when I have worked out my right we shall meet again. If you, I shall know, and keep off. Good-bye, Lucy.

"J. U.

"The one thing I can't forgive myself was the first, a wild impulse, but a cad's.
All the rest was inevitable. Good-bye."

She asked Lancelot what *Quid plura* meant. He snorted. "Hoo! Stale! It means, what are you crying about? naturally. Who said it? That letter? Who's it from? Mr. Urquhart, I suppose?"

"Yes, it's from Mr. Urquhart, to say Good-bye. He's going to Greece, to fly for the navy."

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"Oh. Rather sport. Has he gone?"

"Yes, dear, I think so."

"You'll write to him, I suppose?"

"I might."

"I shall too, then. Rather. I should think so."

THE END

TRANSCRIBER'S NOTE

The following misprints have been corrected:

"vicacious" corrected to "vivacious" (page 97)

"sætters" corrected to "sæters" (page 268)

missing text "w ___" corrected to "where" (page 279)

Other than the corrections listed above, printer's inconsistencies in spelling, punctuation, hyphenation, and ligature usage have been retained.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK LOVE AND LUCY ***

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