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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK EDEN: AN EPISODE ***

EDEN

AN EPISODE

BY EDGAR SALTUS

"Perduto è tutto il tempo che in amar non si spende."
—TASSO.

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*TO E—H AMICISSIMA
New York, 15th May, 1888.*

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EDEN

I.

It was not until Miss Menemon's engagement to John Usselex was made public that the world in which that young lady moved manifested any interest in her future husband. Then, abruptly, a variety of rumors were circulated concerning him. It was said, for instance, that his real name was Tchurchenthaler and that his boyhood had been passed tending geese in a remote Bavarian dorf, from which, to avoid military service, he had subsequently fled. Again, it was affirmed that in Denmark he was known as Baron Varvedsen, and that he had come to this country not to avoid military service, but the death penalty, which whoso strikes a prince of the blood incurs. Others had heard that he was neither Bavarian nor Dane, but the outlawed nephew of a Flemish money-lender whose case he had rifled and whose daughter he had debauched. And there were other people who held that he had found Vienna uninhabitable owing to the number of persistent creditors which that delightful city contained.

In this conflict of gossip the real facts were as difficult of discovery as the truth about Kaspar Hauser, and in view of the divergence of rumors there were people sensible enough to maintain that as these rumors could not all be true, they might all be false. Among the latter was Usselex himself. His own account of his antecedents was to the effect that his father was a Cornishman, his mother a Swiss governess, and that he had been brought up by the latter in Bâle, from which city he had at an early age set out to make his fortune. Whether or not this statement was exact is a matter of minor moment. In any event, supposing for argument's sake that he had more names than are necessary, has not Vishnu a thousand? And as for debts, did not Cæsar owe a hundred million sesterces? But however true or untrue his own account of himself may have been, certain it was that he spoke three languages with the same accent, and that a decennary or so after landing at Castle Garden his name was familiar to everyone connected with banks and banking.

At the time contemporaneous to the episodes with which these pages have to deal John Usselex had reached that age in which men begin to take an interest in hair restorers. In his face was the pallor of a plastercast, his features were correct and coercive, in person he was about the average height, slim and well-preserved. He carried glasses rimmed with tortoise-shell. He wore a beard cut fan-shape and a moustache with drooping ends. Both were gray. In moments of displeasure he smiled, but behind the glasses no merriment was discernible; when they were removed his eyes glowed luminous and shrewd, and in them was a glitter that suggested a reflection caught from the handling and glare of gold. In the financial acceptance of the term he was good; he was at the head of a house that possessed the confidence of the Street, his foreign correspondents were of the best, but in the inner circles of New York life he was as unknown as Ischwanbrat.

Miss Menemon, on the other hand, had no foreign correspondents, but in the circles alluded to she was thoroughly at home. Her father, Mr. Petrus Menemon, was not accounted rich, but he came of excellent stock, and her mother, long since deceased, had been an Imryck. Now, to be an Imryck, to say nothing of being a Menemon, is to be Somebody. Miss Menemon, moreover, was not quite twenty-two years of age. To nine people out of ten she represented little else than the result of the union of an Imryck and a Menemon; but to the tenth, particularly when the tenth happened to be a man, she was as attractive a girl as New York could produce. As a child she had not been noticeably pretty, but when, as the phrase is, she came out, she was assuredly fair to see. She was slight and dark of hair, her face was like the cameo of a Neapolitan boy, but her eyes were not black, they were of that sultry blue which is observable in the ascension of tobacco-smoke through a sunbeam; and about her mouth and in the carriage of her head was something that reminded you of the alertness and expectancy of a bird. She was not innocent, if innocence be taken in the sense of ignorance, but she was clean of mind, of eye, and of tongue. She had been better instructed than the majority of society girls, or, if not better instructed, at least she had read more, and this perhaps, because on emerging from the nursery her father's first care had been to make her unafraid of books.

Petrus Menemon himself was a tall, spare man, scrupulous as to his dress, and quiet of manner. In his face was the expression of one who is not altogether satisfied, and yet wishes everyone else to be content. He had an acquired ignorance which he called agnosticism. He enjoyed the formidable reputation of being well-read; but it is only just to explain that he was well read chiefly in the archaic sense—in the bores and pedants of antiquity. Yet, if his taste was stilted, he made no effort to inculcate that taste in his daughter; he gave her the run of the library and allowed her to drag from the Valhalla of the back books-helves what friends and relatives she chose. Indeed, his attitude to her was one of habitual indulgence. By nature she was as capricious as a day in February, a compound of sunlight, of promise, and of snow; and when she was wilful—and she was often that—he made no effort to coerce, he argued with her as one might with a grown person, seriously, and without anger. And something of that seriousness she caught from him, and with it confidence in his wisdom and trust in his love. To her thinking no one in all the world was superior to that gentle-mannered man.

When she left the nursery she was supplied with a governess, and as she grew older, with masters of different arts and tongues. But as a child she was often lonely, and the children whom she saw playing in the streets were to her objects of indignant envy. On Sunday it was her father's custom to take her to morning service, and afterward to her grandmother, a lady who lived alone in a giant house in South Washington Square, in the upper rooms of which the child was persuaded that coffins lay stored in heaps. During these visits, which were continued every

Sunday until the old lady died, an invariable programme was observed: the child repeated the catechism, recited a verse from the hymnal, after which she was gratified with sponge-cake and a glass of milk, and then was permitted to look at the pictures in a large Bible, in which, by way of frontispiece, was an engraving of a man with a white beard, whom her grandmother said was God. Such, with the exception of tiresome promenades on Second Avenue, where her father's house was situated, such were her relaxations.

And so it came about that in the enforced loneliness of her childhood she ransacked a library in which the "Picara Justina" of Fray Andrs Perez stood side-by-side with the Kalevala, a library in which works stupid as the Koran and dead as Coptic touched covers with the "Idyls of the King" and the fabliaux of mediæval France. Soon she had made friends with the heroes and heroines that are the caryatides of the book-shelves. In their triumphs she exulted; by their failures she was depressed. At the age of thirteen she spoke of King Arthur as though he were her first cousin. The next year she was in love with Amadis of Gaul.

A little later she hung on the wall of her bedroom a bit of embroidery of her own manufacture, a square piece of watered silk, on which in bold relief stood the characters 60 H, a device understood by no one but herself, one which her imagination had evolved out of the aridity of a French copy-book, and which each night and each morning said to her, *Sois sans tache*.

Indeed, her brain had been the haunt of many an odd conceit, the home of fays and goblins. Her imagination was always a garden to her except when it happened to be a morass. She had not only castles in Spain, she had dungeons as well; and of them she was architect, mason, and inhabitant too. It was her mood—a circumstance aiding—that dowered her fancy with wings. Now she would be transported to new horizons where multicolored suns battened on intervalles of unsuspected charm, now she would be tossed into the opacity of an abyss where there would not be so much as a goaf for resting-place. Now Pleasure would lord the day, now the sceptre would be held by Pain. As often as not the intonation of a voice, the expression of a face, any incident however trivial would suffice, and at once a panorama would unroll, with no one but herself for spectator. As she grew older her mind became more staid, its changes and convolutions less frequent. The goblins were replaced by glyptodons, Perrault by Darwin. But the prismatic quality of her fancy remained unimpaired. She garmented everyone with its rays. Those who were nearest to her enjoyed the gayest hues; in others she looked steadfastly for the best. And yet, in spite of this, or precisely on that account, no one was ever better able to distort trifles into nuclei of doubt. In brief, she was March one minute and May the next. Apropos of some misunderstanding, her father said to her jestingly one day, "Eden, did you ever hear of such a thing as hemiopia?" The girl shook her head. "Well," he continued, "there is a disease of that name which affects the eye in such a manner that only half the object looked at is seen. Don't you think you had better consult an oculist?"

Meanwhile her education had been completed by Shakspeare. Love she had learned of Juliet, jealousy of Othello. But of despair Hamlet had been incompetent to teach. She was instinct with generous indignations, enthusiastic of great deeds, and through the quality of her temperament unable to reason herself into an understanding of the base. When she "came out" she found herself unable to share the excited interest which girls of her age exhibited in Delmonico balls. At the dinners and dances to which she was bidden, she was chilled at the discovery that platitude reigned. As a rule, the younger men fought shy of her. She acquired the reputation of making disquieting answers and remarks of curious inappositeness. But now and then she met people that found her singularly attractive and whose hearts went out to her at once, yet these were always people with whom she fancied herself in sympathetic rapport.

Among this class was a man who succeeded Amadis. His name was Dugald Maule; he was six or seven years her senior, and by profession an attorney and counsellor-at-law. It should be noted, however, that he did not look like one. He looked like an athlete that had taken honors, a man to be admired by women and respected by men. In private theatricals he was much applauded. He had studied law in the hope of being judge, and in being judge of pronouncing the death sentence. He could imagine no superber rôle than that. To him, after months of self-examination, Eden Menemon surrendered her heart. The surrender was indeed difficult, but as surrenders go it was complete.

The threads by which he succeeded in attaching her to him it is unnecessary to describe. Suffice it to say that little by little she grew to believe that in him the impeccable resided. She had accustomed herself to consider love in the light of a plant which if rightly tended would bloom into a witherless rose. She had told him this, and together they had watched the bud expand, and when at last it was fulfilled to the tips he saw it in her eyes. That evening, when he had gone, the sense of happiness was so acute that she became quasi-hysterical. The joy of love, slowly intercepted and then wholly revealed, vibrated through the chords of her being, overwhelming her with the force of an unexperienced emotion, and throwing her for relief into a paroxysm of tears. Then followed a day of wonder, in which hallucinations of delight alternated with tremors of self-depreciation. It seemed to her that she was unworthy of such an one as he. For, to her, in her inexperience, he was perfection indeed, one unsulliable and mailed in right. And then, abruptly, as such things occur, without so much as a monition, she read in public print that he had been summoned as a co-respondent. To overwrought nerves as were hers, the announcement was rapider in its effect than a microbe. A fever came that was obliterating as the morrow of steps on the sand. For a week she was delirious, and when at last she left her room the expression of her face had altered. She felt no anger, only an immense distrust of the validity of her intuitions. Had Dugald Maule been in trouble, she would have, if need were, forsaken life for

his sake; but the Dugald Maule for whom she would have been brave had existed only in her own imagination. It was this that brought the fever, and when the fever went, disgust came in its place. It was then that the expression of face altered. She looked like one who is done with love. Presently, and while she was still convalescent, her father sent her abroad with friends, and when she returned, Dugald Maule had to her the reality of a bad dream, a nightmare that she might have experienced in the broad light of an earlier day.

In the course of that winter it so happened that her father one evening brought in to dinner a man whom he introduced as Mr. Usselex. Eden had never seen him before and for the moment she did not experience any notable desire to see him again. She attended, however, with becoming grace to the duties of hostess, and as the conversation between her father and his guest circled in and over stocks, she was not called upon to contribute to the entertainment. When coffee was served she went to her own room and promptly forgot that Mr. Usselex existed.

But in a few days there was Crispin again. On this occasion Eden gave him a larger share of attention than she had previously accorded. There were certain things that she noticed, there was an atmosphere about him which differed from that which other men exhaled. In the tones of his voice were evocations of fancies. He seemed like one who had battled and had won. There was an unusualness in him which impressed and irritated her simultaneously. It was annoying to her that he should intrude, however transiently, into the precincts of her thought. And when he had gone she took her father to task: "What do you have that man to dinner for?" she asked. "Who is he?"

Mr. Menemon, who was looking out of the window, announced that it was snowing, then he turned to her. "Eden," he said, "I am sorry. If you object he need not come again. Really," he continued, after a moment, "I wish you could see your way to being civil to him."

"Surely I am that," she answered.

To this Mr. Menemon assented. "The matter is this," he said. "While you were abroad I became interested in a mine; he is trying to get me out of it. He is something of a prophet, I take it. Though, as yet," he added despondently, "his prophecies have not been realized."

"Then he is a philosopher," said Eden, with a smile; and her father, smiling too, turned again to interview the night.

Thereafter Mr. Usselex was a frequent guest, and presently Eden discovered that her annoyance had disappeared.

The people whom we admire at first sight are rarely capable of prolonging that admiration, and when circumstances bring us into contact with those that have seemed antipathetic, it not infrequently happens that the antipathy is lost. It was much this way with Eden. Little by little, through channels unperceived, the early distaste departed. Hitherto the world had held for her but one class of individuals, the people whom she liked. All others belonged to the landscape. But this guest of her father's suggested a new category; he aroused her curiosity. He left the landscape; he became a blur on it, but a blur on which she strained her eyes. The antipathy departed, and she discovered herself taking pleasure in the speech of one who had originally affected her as a scarabæus must affect the rose.

She discerned in him unsuspected dimensions. He was at home in recondite matters, and yet capable of shedding new light on threadbare themes. During discussions between him and her father at which she assisted she gained an insight into bi-metallism, free trade even, and subjects of like import, the which hitherto she had regarded as abstract diseases created for the affliction of politicians and editorial hacks. He was at home too in larger issues, in the cunning of Ottoman tactics and the beat of drums at Kandahar. Concerning King Arthur he was vague, but he had the power to startle her with new perspectives, the possibilities of dynamics, the abolition of time, the sequestration and conquest of space. And as he spoke easily, fluently, in the ungesticulatory fashion of those that know whereof they speak, more than once she fell to wondering as to the cause of that early dislike. In such wise was Desdemona won.

It so happened that one evening she chanced to dine with a friend of hers, Mrs. Nicholas Manhattan by name, a lady whose sources of social information were large. Among other guests was Alphabet Jones, the novelist.

"Did you ever hear of Mr. Usselex?" Eden asked, over the sweets.

Mrs. Manhattan visibly drew on the invisible cap of thought. "Never heard of him," she presently exclaimed, as one who should say, "and for me not to have heard argues him unknown."

But Jones was there, and he slipped his oar in at once. "I know him," he answered. "He is the son of a shoemaker. No end of money! Some years ago a cashier of his did the embezzlement act, but Usselex declined to prosecute."

"Yes, that is like him," said Eden.

"Ah! you know him, then?" and Jones looked at her. "Well," he continued, "the cashier was sent up all the same. He had a wife, it appeared, and children. Usselex gave them enough to live on, and more too, I believe."

"He must have done it very simply."

"Why, you must know him well!" Jones exclaimed; and the conversation changed.

Meanwhile winter dragged itself along, and abruptly, as is usual with our winters, disappeared. In its stead came a spring that was languider than summer. Fifth Avenue was bright with smart bonnets and gowns of conservatory hues. During the winter months Mr. Menemon's face had been distressed as the pavements, but now it was entirely serene.

It was evident to Eden that Mr. Usselex was not a philosopher alone, but a prophet as well. Concerning him her store of information had increased.

Toward the end of May her father spoke to her about him and about his success with the mine. He seemed pleased, yet nervous. "I saw him this afternoon," he said; "he is to be here shortly. H'm! I am obliged to go to the club for a moment. Will you—would you mind seeing him in my absence?" For a moment he moved uneasily about and then left the room. Eden looked after him in wonder, and took up the *Post*. And as her eyes loitered over the columns the bell rang; her face flushed, and presently she was aware of Usselex' presence.

"What is this my father tells me?" she asked, by way of greeting.

"What is it?" he echoed; he had found a chair and sat like Thor in the court of Utgarda.

"About the mine and all that."

The man eyed her enquiringly for an instant and picked at his cuff. "Let me ask you a question," he said: "Did your father say nothing except about the mine?"

"No, not that I remember, except to imply that you—that he—no, he said nothing worth repeating."

"In finding you alone I supposed he had told you that—"

"That the mine—"

"That I love you."

In the corner of the room was a great colonial clock. Through the silence that followed it ticked sleepily, as though yawning at the avowal. Mr. Usselex had bent forward; he watched the girl. She was occupied in tearing little slips from the paper which lay in her lap. She did not seem to have heard him at all.

"Miss Menemon," he continued, "I express myself badly. Do not even take the trouble to say that you do not care for me. It is impossible that you should. You know nothing of me; you—"

"Oh, but I do though," the girl exclaimed. "The other day, a month or two ago, I have forgotten, someone said your father was a shoemaker, and what not about you beside. Oh, I know a great deal—"

"Then, Miss Menemon, you must know the penalty which is paid for success." He straightened himself, the awkwardness had left him, and he seemed taller than when he entered the room. "Yes," he continued, "the door to success is very low, and the greater is he that bends the most. Let a man succeed in any one thing, and whatever may be the factors with which that success is achieved, Envy will call a host of enemies into being as swiftly as Cadmus summoned his soldiery. And these enemies will come not alone from the outer world, but from the ranks of his nearest friends. Ruin a man's home, he may forget it. But excel him, do him a favor, show yourself in any light his superior, then indeed is the affront great. Mediocrity is unforgiving. We pretend to admire greatness, but we isolate it and call that isolation Fame. It is above us; we cannot touch it; but mud is plentiful and that we can throw. And if no mud be at hand, we can loose that active abstraction, malice, which subsists on men and things. No; had I an enemy I could wish him no greater penance than success—success prompt, vertiginous, immense! To the world, as I have found it, success is a crime, and its atonement, not death, but torture. Truly, Miss Menemon, humanity is not admirable. Men mean well enough, no doubt; but nature is against them. Libel is the tribute that failure pays to success. If I am slandered, it is because I have succeeded. But what is said of my father is wholly true. He did make shoes, God bless him! and very good shoes they were. Pardon me for not having said so before."

Eden listened as were she assisting at the soliloquy of an engastrimuth. The words he uttered seemed to come less from him than from one unknown yet not undevined. And now, as he paused for encouragement or rebuke, he saw that her eyes were in his.

"Miss Menemon," he continued, "forget my outer envelope; if you could read in my heart, you would find it full of love for you."

"Perhaps," she said, and smiled as at a vista visible only to herself. "I will tell my father what you say," she added demurely.

With that answer Mr. Usselex was fain to be content. And presently, when he had gone, she wondered how it was that she had ever cared for Dugald Maule.

A week later the engagement of Miss Menemon to John Usselex was announced. Much comment was excited, and the rumors alluded to were industriously circulated. But comment and rumors notwithstanding, the marriage took place, and after it the bride left her father's dingy little house on Second Avenue for a newer and larger one on Fifth. Many people had envied Usselex his

wealth; on that day they envied him his bride.

II.

It was late in November before Eden found herself in full possession of her new home. Shortly after the ceremony she had gone to Newport, and when summer departed she made for Lennox, which she deserted for Tuxedo. It was therefore not until the beginning of winter that the brown hollands were removed from her town residence.

During the intervening months she had been wholly content. She had not led the existence of which at sixteen she had dreamed in the recesses of her father's library, nor yet such an one as Dugald Maule had had the ability to suggest. On the other hand, she had for her husband something that was more than love. She regarded him as one of the coefficients of the age. Among the rumors which her engagement created was one to the effect that she was to be used as Open Sesame to doors hitherto closed to him; and this rumor, like the others, some fair little demon of a friend had whispered in her ear. But the possibility of such a *quid pro quo* had left her undisturbed. If a privilege paltry as that were hers to bestow, there was indeed no reason why she should begrudge it.

It so happened, however, that she was not called upon to make the slightest effort in that direction. Everybody discussed the marriage, and at the wedding, as is usually the case, the front seats were occupied by those who had said the most in its disfavor. At Newport there was a fleeting hesitation. But the exclusion of the bride from entertainments being practically impossible, and moreover, as it is not considered seemly to invite a wife and overlook a husband, both were bidden; and to the surprise of many it was discovered that Usselex had not only as fine an air as many of the foreign noblemen that passed that way, but that he even possessed a keener appreciation of conventionalities. Added to this his wealth was reported to be fabulous. What more could Newport ask? If his origin was more or less dubious, were there not many whose origins were worse than dubious, whose origins were *known*? Indeed, not everyone was qualified to throw a stone, and gradually any thought of stone-throwing was dismissed. His opponents became his supporters, and after the *villegiatura* at Lennox and at Tuxedo no further question was raised.

In returning to town therefore, Eden was wholly content. She had married a man of whom she was proud, a man who, while subservient to her slightest wish, had taught her what love might be. Altogether, the world seemed larger, and she felt fully prepared to do her duty in that sphere of life to which God had called her.

That sphere of life, she presently discovered, was to be co-tenanted by her husband's secretary. Usselex had mentioned his existence on more than one incidental occasion, but after each mention the actuality of that existence had escaped her; and a week or so after her return to town she found herself mediocrally pleased at learning that he would probably be a frequent guest at her dinner-table.

In answer to the query which her eyebrows took on at this intelligence, Usselex explained that now and then, through stress of business, he was in Wall Street unable to provide the individual in question with his fullest instructions, and for that reason it was expedient for him to have the man of an evening at the house. Immediately Eden's fancy evoked the confidential clerk of the London stage, a withered bookkeeper, shiny of garment, awkward of manner, round of shoulder, square of nail, explosive with figures, and covered with warts, and on the evening in which the secretary was to make his initial appearance she weaponed herself with a vinaigrette.

But of the vinaigrette she had no need whatever. The secretary entered the drawing-room with the unembarrassed step of a somnambulist. His manner was that of one aware that the best manner consists in the absence of any at all. His coat might have come from Piccadilly, and when he found a seat Eden noticed that the soles of his shoes were veneered in black. In brief, he looked well-bred and well-groomed. He was young, twenty-three or twenty-four at most. His head was massive, and his features were pagan in their correctness. The jaw was a masterpiece; it gave the impression of reservoirs of interior strength, an impression which was tempered when he spoke, for his voice was low and unsonorous as a muffled bell. His eyes were of that green-gray which is caught in an icicle held over grass. And in them and about his mouth something there was that suggested that he could never be brutal and seldom tender.

At table he made no remark worthy of record. He seemed better content to watch Eden than to speak. He ate little and drank less, and when the meal was done and Eden left him to her husband and the presumable cigar, she made up her mind that he was stupid.

"He is a German," she reflected; "with such a name as Adrian Arnswald he must be. H'm. The only German I ever liked was a Frenchman, the author of the *Reisebilder*. Well, there seems to be no *bilder* of any kind in him." She picked up the *Post* and promptly lost herself in a review of the opera. "There," she mused, "I forgot Wagner. After all, as some one said of the Scotch, you can do a good deal with a German if you catch him young. Mr. Arnswald does not appear to have been caught in time." She threw the paper from her and seated herself at the piano. For a moment her fingers strayed over the keys, and then, in answer to some evoking chord, she attacked the

Ernani involami, than which few melodies are richer in appeal. Her voice was not of the bravura quality, the lower register was not full, and the staccati notes were beyond her range; a professor from a conservatory would have disapproved of her method as he would have disapproved of that of the ruiceñor. But then the ruiceñor sings out of sheer wantonness, because it cannot help it; and so did she.

And as she sang, anyone who had chanced that way would have accounted her fair to see. Her gown was black, glittered with jet, about her throat was a string of pearls, her arms were bare, the wrists unbraceleted, and in her face that beauty of youth and of fragility which refinement heightens and which eclipses the ruddier characteristics of the buxom models of the past. An artist might not have given her a second glance, a poet would have adored her at the first. And as she still sang, Arnswald entered the room and approached the piano at which she sat.

She heard his steps and turned at once expectant of Usselex. Then, seeing that he was alone, "What have you done with my husband?" she asked.

"Nothing," the young man answered. "Nothing at all. A gentleman, a customer, I fancy, sent in his card, and I left him to him." He found a seat and eyed her gravely. "If I disturb you—"

"Oh, you don't disturb me in the least. What makes you look as though you came from another planet?"

"What makes *you* look as though you were going to one?"

Mr. Arnswald is passably impertinent, thought Eden; but the expression of his face was so reassuringly devoid of any non-conventional symptom that she laughed outright at the compliment. "Do you care for music?" she asked.

"Surely, Mrs. Usselex."

"Yes, of course. I forgot. All Germans do. Tell me, how long have you been in this country? How do you come to speak German without an accent?"

"I was born here, Mrs. Usselex."

"You were born here! I thought you were a German. Why didn't you tell me?"

"You did not do me the honor to ask."

"But your father was, wasn't he?"

"No, my father was a Russian, I think."

"You think? Why do you say you think? Don't you know? I never knew anyone so absurd."

"My father died when I was very young, Mrs. Usselex. I do not remember him."

"But your mother could have told you—"

"If she didn't, Mrs. Usselex, it was because she had a good excuse."

"What was that?"

"She died also."

"Mr. Arnswald, I am sorry. I had no right to ask such thoughtless questions. My mother died too. I do not remember her either. Truly you must forgive me." And as she spoke she rose from the piano and reseated herself at the lounge which she had previously vacated. "Tell me about yourself," she added. "I am not asking out of idle curiosity."

"You are very good to express any interest, Mrs. Usselex. But really there is little to tell. I used to live in Massachusetts, in Salem, with my grand-parents and my sister. You can see Salem from here, and you can understand what a boy's life in such a place must be. Afterwards I was sent to school, and later I went abroad. When I returned Mr. Usselex took me in his office. I have been there ever since. He has been very kind to me, Mr. Usselex has."

"He says—how is it he puts it?—oh, he says you have the genius of finance."

"I can only repeat that he is very kind."

To this Eden assented. "Yes, he is that," she said, and hesitated for a moment. "Tell me," she added. "You said you were fond of music. Will you go with us on Monday to the opera?"

This invitation was accepted with the same readiness as that with which it was made. And presently the young man took his leave. When the portière fell behind him, Eden felt a momentary uneasiness at the unpremeditated invitation which she had just extended. One doesn't need to be a German to be stupid, she mused, and felt sure that her husband would disapprove. But when she told him he expressed himself as well pleased.

The next day happened to be Sunday, and on that afternoon Mr. Arnswald came to pay his dinner-call. Meanwhile Eden's imagination had been at work. Now imagination is a force of which the action is as varied as that of volition. There are organizations which it affects like a dissolvent, there are others which it affects like wine. In some it needs a spur, in others a curb. Give it an incident for incubator, and according to the nature of the individual it will soar full-

feathered into space or addle in its own inaction. In Eden its gestation was always abrupt. With a fact for matrix it developed as rapidly as a spark mounts into flame. The fact in this instance was Arnswald.

When he left her the night before, she had gone again to the piano, her fingers had fluttered like butterflies over the keys, then in answer to some strain, an aria from the *Regina di Golconda* had visited her—the *Bel paese, ciel ridente*, which she had hummed softly to herself, unconscious of any significance in the words. But presently she fell to wondering about the fair land, the fairer sky which the song recalled. Something there was that kept telling her that she had met Adrian before. In his voice she had caught an inflection that was not unfamiliar to her. In the polar-light of his eyes was a suggestion of earlier acquaintance. His infrequent gestures brought her the shadow of a reminiscence. And in his face there was an expression that haunted her. For a while she struggled with memory. But memory is a magician that declines to be coerced. Now and then it will pull its victim by the sleeve, as it had pulled at Eden, yet turn to interrogate and a dream is not more evanescent. But still she struggled with it. A silence, an attitude, a combination purely atmospheric had evoked a charm, and though memory declined to return and undo the spell, still she labored until at last, conscious of the futility of the effort, or else wearied by the endeavor, she consoled herself as in similar circumstances we all of us have done with the mirage of anterior life.

The possibility of recognition she then put behind her, but the man remained. There was a magnificence about him which disconcerted her, an air that appealed. In some way his evening dress had seemed an incongruity. She told herself that he would look better in a silken pourpoint, and better still in the chlamys-robe of state. She decided that he needed a dash of color, some swirling plume of red, and fell to wondering what his life had been. It was evident to her that he had been gently bred. About him the feminine influence was discernible, one no doubt which begun at the cradle had continued ever since. In the absence of a mother there had been someone else, a sister, perhaps, and a procession of sweethearts to whom he had been swain. But the latter possibility she presently dismissed. Love-making is the occupation of those that have none, and Arnswald's hours were seemingly well-filled. In Salem he might have left a combustible maiden, he might even have found one in New York, but in that case Eden felt tolerably sure that he had little time in which to apply the match. And then at once her fancy took a tangential flight; a little romance unrolled before her—the mating of Arnswald to some charming girl whom she would herself discover, and the life-long friendship that would ensue.

On the following afternoon therefore, when the young man put in an appearance, he was received with unaffected cordiality.

"I have been thinking about you," Eden announced, when he found a seat. "I am glad you came, I want you to tell me more of yourself."

"I reproached myself for having exhausted your patience last evening," he answered.

"Then you deserve to be punished. You go with us to the opera to-morrow, do you not? Very good, you must dine with us first. There is a friend of mine whom you will meet there. I want you to like her."

"If she resembles you in any way that will not be difficult."

"He begins well," mused Eden, and a layer of cordiality dropped from her. But presently she recovered it. Arnswald had been looking in her face, and the change in its expression had not passed unobserved.

"I mean," he continued, "that there are people that make you like them at first sight and you, Mrs. Usselex, are one of those people. When I left you last evening I told myself that you exhaled a sympathy which is as rare as it is delightful. I have met few such as you. As a rule the people I have been brought in contact with have been hard and self-engrossed. You are among the exceptions, and it is the exception——"

Eden interrupted him. "Now that is nonsense," she said severely. "The people whom we can like are not as infrequent as all that. Do you mean to tell me that there is no one for whom you really care?"

Arnswald shook his head and smiled. "No, Mrs. Usselex," he answered, "I don't mean to say that. There are some for whom I care very much. There is even one for whom were it necessary I would lay down life itself."

At this Eden experienced a mental start. The possibility of mating him to some charming girl whom she was herself to discover had suddenly become remote. But she nodded encouragingly to the confidence.

"Yes," he continued, and into his polar-eyes came a sudden flicker. "Yes, there is one whom I have recently come to know and who is to me as a prayer fulfilled. Were I called upon to make a sacrifice for her, no matter what the nature of that sacrifice might be, the mere doing of it would constitute a well-spring of delight."

Eden smiled at the dithyramb as were she listening to some fay she did not see. Arnswald had been looking at her, but now, as though ashamed of the outburst, he affected a little laugh and dropped back into the conventional. Presently he rose and took his polar-eyes away. When he had gone Eden smiled again. "He may have the genius of finance," she mused, "but he has the genius

III.

Eden had but recently returned to town and the claims of mantua-makers and milliners were oppressive. They took her time, they came to her in the morning, and she, with the courtesy of kings, returned the visit in the afternoon. But to little purpose. They were vexatious people, she discovered. They deceived her wantonly. They promised and did not fulfill. The live-long day they had irritated her, they had obtained her confidence by false pretences, and now, after a round of interviews each more profitless than the last, on reaching her house the dust of shops was on her mantle, and she could have gone in a corner and sworn.

Moreover it was late, dinner would presently be served. Arnswald, she learned, had already arrived, he was in the parlor with her husband, and as she hurried to her room she told herself that she would have to dress in haste, an operation which to her was always fertile in annoyance. An entire hour was never too much. But her maid was agile, dexterous of hand, and before the clock marked seven she was fully equipped, arrayed for dinner and the opera as well.

On leaving the room, Eden left her vexation behind her. It had been fleeting and inoffensive as the anger of a canary. And now, on descending the stairs, she was in great good spirits again, the crimes of mantua-makers and milliners were forgotten, and she prepared to meet her husband and her guest. Half-way on her journey to the drawing-room, however, she discovered that she was empty-handed; she had omitted to take a fan and she called to her maid to bring her one. And as she called the front door-bell rang. She hesitated a second, and called again. But presumably the maid did not hear. Thereupon Eden re-ascended the stairs and went back to her room.

The maid was busying herself in a closet and the fan was on the table; Eden picked it up, and as she did so she noticed that one of the sticks was broken. It took several minutes to find another which suited her gown, and when she again descended the stair some little time had intervened.

On reaching the parlor she drew the portière aside and peered into the room. At the furthest end stood Arnswald, his back turned to her, and near him in a low arm-chair was her husband. He seemed to be reading something, and it was evident that her entrance had been unobserved either by him or by his guest.

For a second's space Eden stood very still. There was much of the child in her nature, and during that second she meditated on the feasibility of giving them both some little surprise. Then at once, as though impelled by invisible springs, she crossed the room very swiftly, very noiselessly, her fan and the fold of her dress in one hand, the other free for mischief, and just when she reached the chair in which her husband sat, she bent over him, from his unwarned fingers she snatched a note, and with a rippling laugh that was like the shiver of sound on the strings of a guitar, she waved it exultingly in the air.

Mr. Usselex looked up at once, but he had looked too late; the note had gone from him. He started, he made a movement to repossess himself of it, but Eden, with the ripple still in her voice, stepped back, laughed again, and nodded to Arnswald, who had turned and bowed. "What is it?" she cried; "what have you two been concocting? No, you don't," she continued. Her voice was unsteady with merriment, her eyes wickedly jubilant. Usselex had made another attempt to recapture the letter, and flaunting it, Tantalus-fashion, above her head, she defied and eluded him, gliding backwards, her head held like a swan's, a trifle to one side. "No, you don't," she repeated, and still the laughter rippled from her.

"Eden!" her husband expostulated, "Eden—"

"You shall not have it, sir; you shall not." And with a pirouette she fluttered yet further away, the bit of paper held daintily and aloft between forefinger and thumb. "Tell me this instant what you have been doing all day. There, you needn't look at Mr. Arnswald. He won't help you. Will you, Mr. Arnswald? Of course you won't."

Usselex, conscious of the futility of pursuit, made no further effort. In his face was an anxiety which his fair tormentor did not see. Once he turned to Arnswald, and Arnswald gave him an answering glance, and once his lips moved, but whatever he may have intended to say the words must have stuck in his throat. And Eden, woman-like, seeing that she was no longer pursued, advanced to a spot just beyond his reach, where she hovered tauntingly, yet wary of his slightest movement and prepared at the first suspicion of reprisal to spread her wings in flight.

"And who do you suppose was here at lunch to-day? You must guess or you shan't have your letter back. I'll give you just one minute. Oh! I saw Laura Manhattan at Fantasia's. Don't forget that we are to dine with her to-morrow. She came in to row about a dress. I was rowing, too. You have no idea what a day I have had. You will have to give Fantasia a talking to. Look at the frippery I have on. And she promised that I should have something for to-night. There ought to be some punishment for such people. Don't you think so, Mr. Arnswald? When people in Wall Street don't keep their promises, they are put in jail, aren't they? Well, jail is too good for that horrid old French-woman of a dressmaker, she ought to have the thumb-screws, the rack, and the hot side

of the fagot. I will never believe her again, no, not even when I know she is telling the truth. She is the most ornamental liar I ever encountered. It is my opinion she would rather lie than not. Laura told me—but here, the minute's up—you must guess, you must guess rightly, and you can only guess once."

And Eden waved the letter again and laughed in her husband's beard.

The gown which she wore, and which she had characterized as frippery, was an artful combination of tulle and of silk; it was colorless, yet silvery, and in it Eden, bare of arm and of neck, looked a water nymph garmented in sheen and foam. From her hair came an odor of distant oases. In her eyes were evocations of summer, and beneath them, on her cheeks and on the lobes of her ears, health had placed its token in pink. The corners of her mouth were upraised like the ends of the Greek bow, and now that she was laughing her lips suggested a red fruit cut in twain. She was the personification of caprice, adorably constructed, and constructed to be adored. Arnswald evidently found her appearance alluring, for his eyes followed her every movement.

"Hurry up," she continued, as merrily as before; "the minute's gone."

Usselex may have been annoyed, but he affected to enter into the jest. "Your father—" he hazarded, and stretched his hand for the note.

But Eden again retreated. "You have lost," she cried; "no one was here." And finding herself at a safe distance, "I am a better guesser than you," she added, "I can tell what is in this letter without reading it. Now answer me, what will you give me if I do? What ought he to give me, Mr. Arnswald? Prompt him, can't you? I have never seen anyone so stupid."

"Give it to me, Eden; you shall make your own terms——"

"Ah! you capitulate, do you? It's too late! It's too late!" she repeated in ringing crescendo. "You ought to have guessed;" and for greater safety she held the letter behind her. "It's about stocks, Kansas-back bonds, seven sights offered and nothing bid—I have guessed right, have I not?"

"Eden——"

"Answer me; I have guessed right, I know I have." And laughing still, she whisked the letter from behind her and held it to her eyes. "Why, it's from a woman," she cried. "What is this? 'You have filled my life with living springs.' Whose life have you filled?"

The merriment had deserted her lips, the color had gone from her cheeks. The hand which held the letter fell with it to her side. In her face was the contraction of pain. She looked at her husband. "Whose life is it that you have filled?" she asked, and her voice, that had rippled with laughter a moment before, became suddenly chill and subdued.

In the doorway before her the butler appeared in silent announcement that dinner was served.

Arnswald made a step forward. "The letter is mine, Mrs. Usselex," he said, "I——"

"Oh," she murmured, with a sigh that might have been accounted one of relief. "Oh, it is yours, is it?" And eying him inquisitorially for a second's space, she placed the letter in his hand.

"We may as well go in to dinner," she added at once, and with a glance at her husband she led the way.

IV.

In Dogian days there was a Libro d'Oro in which the First Families of Venice were inscribed in illuminated script. In New York there is also a Golden Book, unwritten, yet voiced, and whose name appears thereon has earned the cataloguing not from the idlesse of imbecile forefathers, but from shrewdness in coping with the public, forethought in the Stock Exchange, and prescience in the values of land and grain.

At the opera that night the aristocrats of the New World were in full force. Among them were men who could not alone have wedded the Adriatic but have dowered her as well. Venice in her greatest splendor had never dreamed such wealth as theirs. There was Jabez Robinson, his wife and children, familiarly known as the Swiss Family Robinson, the founder of their dynasty having emigrated from some Helvetian vale. A lightning calculator might have passed a week in the summing up of their possessions. There was old Jerolomon, who through the manipulation of monopolies exhaled an odor of Sing-Sing, the which had been so attractive to the nostrils of an English peer that he had taken his daughter as wife. There was Madden, who controlled an entire state. There was Bucholz, who declared himself Above the Law, and who had erupted in New York three decades before with the seven sins for sole capital. There was Bleecker Bleecker, who each year gave away a pope's ransom to charity and pursued his debtors to the grave. There was Dunwoodie, whose coat smelled of benzine and whose signature was potent as a king's. There was Forbush, who lunched furtively on an apple and had given a private establishment to each one of his twelve children. There was Gwathmeys, who had twice ruined himself for his enemies and made a fortune from his friends. There was Attersol, who could have bought the White House and whose sole pleasures were window-gardening and the accord of violins.

On the grand-tier was Mrs. Besalul, on whom society had shut its door because she had omitted to close her own. In an adjoining box was Mrs. Smithwick, the bride of a month, fairer than that queen whose face was worth the world to kiss, and who the previous winter had written a novel of such impropriety that when it was published her mother forbade her to read it. There was Miss Pickett, a *débutante*, who possessed the disquieting ugliness of a monkey and who had announced that there was nothing so immoral as ennui. There was Mrs. Bouvery, who claimed connection with every one whose name began with Van. Mrs. Hackensack, one of the few surviving Knickerbockers. The Coenties twins, known as Dry and Extra Mumm. And there were others less interesting. Mrs. Ponder, for instance, famous for her musicales, which no one could be bribed to attend. Mrs. Skolfield, who was so icy in her manner that a poet who had once ventured her way, had caught a cold in his head which lasted a week. Mrs. Nevers, mailed in diamonds; Mrs. Goodloe, mailed in pearls; and a senator's wife in a bonnet.

The only empty box in the house was owned by Mr. Incoul, then abroad on his honeymoon.

And in and out through these boxes sauntered a contingent of men, well-groomed, white of glove, and flowered as to their button-holes. Among them was Harry Tandem, who had inaugurated silver studs. Brewster, who had invented a new figure for the cotillion, and with him Harrison Felton, the *maëstro* of that decadent dance. There was George Rerick, who stuttered to the *débutantes* as he had stuttered to their mothers before them. Furman Fellowes, who told fairy tales to impressionable young girls, and who would presently get drunk in Sixth Avenue. Jack Rodney, M. F. H., and Alphabet Jones, the novelist, in search of points.

As Eden entered the vestibule of her box the curtain had parted on the second act. A Miss Bolten and her mother whom she had invited had already arrived, and Arnswald, she noticed, went immediately forward to salute them; then returning, he assisted her with her wrap. In a moment the vestibule was invaded by Jones; and Eden, after a word or two to her guests, settled herself in the front of the box and promenaded her opera-glass about the house. The promenade completed, she lowered it to the stalls. Near the orchestra a woman sat gazing fixedly at her. There was nothing remarkable about the woman. She was as well dressed, as young, and as pretty as were the majority of those present; it was the singularity of her attitude that arrested Eden's attention. But that attention she was not permitted to prolong. The adjoining box, the occupants of which she had not yet noticed, was tenanted by Mrs. Manhattan, who now claimed her recognition with some little feminine word of greeting. On one side of Mrs. Manhattan was an elderly man whom Eden did not remember to have seen before, and behind her stood Dugald Maule.

"Eden," whispered Mrs. Manhattan, "I want you to know Mr. Maule's uncle; he has been minister abroad you know;" and so saying, with a motion of her head, she designated the elderly man at her side. "He says," she added, "that you are the most appetizing thing he has seen."

At the brusqueness of the remark Eden started as from a sting. The old gentleman leaned forward.

"Don't be annoyed, my dear," he mumbled; "I was in love with your mother."

Then with an amiable commonplace the old beau bowed and moved back.

Maule bowed also, and presently, taking advantage of a *recitative*, he left Mrs. Manhattan and entered Eden's box. He seemed at home at once. He shook Mr. Usselex by the hand, saluted Miss Bolten and her mother, ignored Jones, and dislodging Arnswald, took his seat.

"The season promises well," he whispered confidentially to Eden.

Jones, who had not accorded the slightest attention to Maule, was discoursing in an animated fashion with Miss Bolten. On the stage in a canvas forest a man stood, open-mouthed, raising and lowering his right arm at regular intervals; and next to her Eden caught the motion of Mrs. Manhattan's fan.

"No," she heard Jones say, "I have every reason to doubt that Shakspeare was the author of Hamlet. In the first place—"

"Ah!" murmured Miss Bolten. She did not appear particularly interested in Jones or in the man on the stage. She was occupied in scrutinizing the occupants of the different boxes. "And whom do you suspect?" she asked, her eyes foraging an opposite *baignoire*.

"Another man with the same name," Jones answered, and laughed a little to himself.

Eden tapped him on the sleeve. "Mr. Jones."

"Yes, Mrs. Usselex."

"Look in the orchestra, in the third row, the aisle seat on the left."

"Yes, Mrs. Usselex."

"There is a woman looking up here. She has just turned her head. Do you see her?"

"That woman with the blonde hair?"

"Yes; do you know her?"

"No, I can't say I know her. But I know who she is—"

"Who is she?"

"She has an apartment at the Ranleigh. Her name is Mrs. Feverill. She is a grass widow; rather fly, I fancy——"

"H'm;" said Eden, "I am sure I don't know what you mean by 'fly.' There, it isn't necessary to explain——" She turned her head—"Mr. Arnswald, would you mind getting me my cloak, there seems to be a draught."

Arnswald, who had been loitering in the rear of the box, went back into the vestibule in search of the garment.

On the stage the tenor in green and gold was still gesticulating, open-mouthed as before, and presently there came a blare of trumpets, a shudder of brass, dominated by the cry of violins, and abruptly the curtain fell.

Arnswald advanced with the cloak, and Jones stood up. The latter said some parting word to Miss Bolten and to her mother, bent over Eden's hand and left the box. Arnswald dropped in the seat which he had vacated. It was evident at once that he and Miss Bolten had met before. He had leaned forward, and was whispering in her ear.

"Eden," Maule began, "do you remember that ring you gave me?"

"Mr. Maule, you forget many things——"

"Why do you call me Mr. Maule? there was a time——"

"Yes, there was a time, as you say; but that time is no longer."

"You have something against me."

"I? Nothing in the world."

"Ah, but Eden, you have, though; that is evident: when I last saw you——"

"The next day I learned your reputation. It is deplorable."

"When I last saw you you gave me a ring. A serpent with its tail in its mouth. You said it meant eternity."

"Yes, I know I did; but——"

"Did it mean nothing as well?"

"A circle represents zero, does it not?"

"Eden, Eden, how cruel you can be! Will you not let me see you?"

"Certainly, I am at home on Saturdays."

"Yes, I know—Saturday is Fifth Avenue day. Eden, tell me, do you remember Second Avenue?"

From the orchestra came a murmur, a consonance of harps and of flutes. The curtain had parted again.

"No," she answered; "I have forgotten."

"Surely——"

"Yes, I have forgotten. It is good to forget. This is the last act, is it not?"

"No, it is the prologue."

The speech was as significant as her own. For a second he was silent, and bit his under lip. Then, as Jones had done before, he stood up.

"I will come," he muttered in her ear, "but not on Saturday."

"Good-night, Mr. Maule."

"Good-night, Mrs. Usselex."

With a circular salute to the other occupants, Maule left the box. Presently it was invaded by other visitors of whom no particular mention is necessary. At last there was a wail and final crash in the orchestra. The opera was done.

On the way home Usselex questioned his wife. "Who is that man Maule?" he asked.

"Miss Bolten is interested in him, I believe."

"I hope not," Usselex returned; "he has a bad face."

The next morning Eden awoke in her great room that overlooked Fifth Avenue. The night had been constellated with dreams, and now as they faded from her there was one that lingered behind. Through a rift of consciousness she had seen herself talking with feverish animation to Arnswald, on some subject of vital importance, the which, however, she was unable to recall; it had gone with the night, leaving on the camera of memory only the tableau behind. For a little space she groped after it unavailingly, and then dismissed it from her. But still the tableau lingered until it became obscured by her own vexation. She felt annoyed as at an impertinence. What right had Arnswald to trespass in her dreams?

She rang the bell, and when in answer to the summons her maid appeared, she gave herself up to the woman's ministrations. The annoyance faded as the dream had done, and she fell to thinking of the day and of her husband. At one there was a luncheon at which she was expected, and in the evening there was a dinner at Mrs. Manhattan's. Her husband, she knew, had gone to his office hours ago and would not return until late. It had occurred to her before that he worked harder than his clerks; even Arnswald seemed to have more leisure than he. But on this particular forenoon, when her equipment was completed, but one idea channeled her ruminations, and that was that if her husband worked harder than his clerks, it was because of her.

She smiled a little at the thought, and then at herself in the mirror. Truly the guests at the luncheon might have been recruited from the four quarters of the globe, and few could be fairer than she. She was contented with her appearance, not in any sense because it might eclipse that of other women, but because he was proud of it, and because his pride and laborious days were all in all for her. She gave to her gown and to the arrangement of her hair that *coup de maître* which no maid, however expert, is able to administer, and presently had herself driven up the avenue to the house at which she was to be entertained.

The luncheon, as the phrase is, went off very well. Made up of fresh gossip and new dishes, it was stupid yet agreeable, as women's luncheons are apt to be. But on leaving it Eden felt depressed. It was the first of the kind which in her quality of married woman she had attended, and as her carriage rolled down the avenue again, she wondered were it possible that such things as she heard could be true, the story that had been told about Viola Raritan, for instance, and the general agreement following it that married men were the worst^[1]. Surely, she told herself, they might be, all of them indeed save one, who was above reproach. As for her recent companions, they discredited virtue in seeming to possess it. At the memory of things they had implied, the color mounted to her cheeks.

On the opposite sidewalk a girl was loitering. For a second, Eden, through the open window, eyed her gown. She raised some flowers to her face, and when she put them down again her face was white. Through the window she had seen a cab pass, and in the cab her husband and a woman.

In a conflict of emotions such as visit those who learn the dishonor and the death of one they cherished most, Eden reached her door. She left the carriage before the groom had descended from the box, and hurried into the house. There she entered the drawing-room and sought for a moment to collect her thoughts. It was impossible, she kept telling herself, that such a thing could be. She had been mistaken; it was not her husband that she had seen, and if it were her husband then was he on some errand as innocent as her own. But it was her husband. The effort she was making to deceive herself was useless as broken glass. And as for the woman with whom he was driving, what had he to do with her or she with him? She was certain she had seen her face before.

In her nervousness she rose from her seat and paced the room, tearing her gloves off and tossing them from her as she walked.

In the lives of most of us there are hours of such distress that in search of a palliative we strive as best we may to cheat ourselves into thinking that the distress is but a phase of our own individual imagination, close-locked therein, barred out of real existence, and unimportant and delusive as the creations of dream. And as Eden paced the room she tried to feel that her distress was but a figment of fancy, an illusory representation evoked out of nothing. She had been enervated by the gossip of the lunch-table; a child startled by the possible horrors of a dark closet was never more absurd than she. It was nonsense to suppose that a man such as her husband could be capable of a vulgar intrigue.

On the mantel a clock ticked dolently, as though in sympathy with her woe, and presently to her inattentive ears, it rang out four times. In an hour, she reflected, in two hours at most, he would return. She would ask him where he had been, and everything would be explained. It was nonsense for her to torment herself. Of course it would be explained, and meanwhile---

And as she determined that meanwhile she would give the matter no further thought the butler entered the room, bearing a note on a salver, which he gave to her and withdrew. The superscription was in her husband's handwriting and she pulled the envelope apart, confident that the explanation for which she sought was contained therein. But in it no explanation was visible. It was dated from Wall Street. "Dearest Eden," it ran, "I am detained on business. Send excuses to Mrs. Manhattan. In haste, as ever, J. U."

"Detained on business," she repeated aloud very firmly and pressed her hand to her head. She was calm, less agitated than she had been before. It behooved her to determine what she should do. Seemingly, but one course was open to her, and suddenly she perceived that she had stopped

thinking. Night had seized and surrounded her; it was of this, perhaps, that she had spoken to Arnswald in her dream.

In the morning her faith had been unobscured, confident as a flower at dawn. Then doubt had come, and now, as the afternoon departed, so did all belief as well. It was no more hers to recall than the promise of an earlier day. She had done her best to detain it, she had clutched it; but she had questioned, and faith is impatient of coercion and restless if examined. Save its own fair face it brings no letter of introduction; welcome it for that, and it is at once at home; but look askance, and it dissolves into a memory and a reproach. Eden had startled it, unwittingly perhaps; but she had startled it none the less. It had watched its opportunity as a guest illy treated may watch for his; and when suspicion, like the lackey that it is, had held the door ajar, it had eluded her and gone.

Automatically, as though others than herself guided her movement, Eden touched a bell. "Harris," she said, when the man appeared, "go to Mrs. Manhattan's and say that Mr. Usselex and myself are unavoidably prevented from dining with her to-night. That will do." And this order delivered, she resumed her former seat. Down the street she marked advancing dusk. The sun had sunk in cataracts of champagne. Westward the sky was like the apotheosis in Faust, green-barred and crimson, with background of oscillant yellow. The east was already grey. Overhead was a shade of salmon which presently disappeared. Then dusk came, and with it a colorless vapor through which Night, cautious at first as misers are, displayed one sequin, then another, till taking heart it unbarred all its treasury to the world.

For some time after the man had gone Eden remained in the drawing-room. She found her gloves and drew one on again, but the other she tormented abstractedly in her hand. In her enforced inaction she fell to consoling herself as children do, arguing with discomfiture as though its shadow was ineffectual, as though trouble and she were face to face, and yet too far removed one from another to ever really meet. An hour passed, and still she sat unassured, restless of thought and conscious only that an encroaching darkness had obscured a vista on which her eyes had loved to dwell.

Truly the heart has logic that logic does not know, and as Eden let the incidents of the afternoon and of the previous evening parade in dumb show before her, something there was that kept whispering that she was taking appearances for facts. She strove to listen to the whisper, but the fantoches were froward and insistent; the sturdier her effort to dispel them the closer they swarmed. Sometimes of their own accord they would leave her, she would think herself done with them, her eyes filled in testimony to her deliverance, and abruptly back they came. But still the whisper persisted, it was growing potent, and its voice was clear. It kept exhorting to patience, it exorcised appearances, and advanced little pleas of its own.

Eden was only too willing to be guided. "I am impatient," she mused, "but I will wait."

Another hour limped away, and though an hour limps it may leave a balm behind. The lamps in the drawing-room had been lighted, but the servant had come and gone unobserved. Eden was still closeted in herself. "Surely, by eleven at the latest he will return," she reflected, "and then all will be explained. It is a thankless task this of building imaginary dungeons. There are hours in which I let fancies resolve themselves into facts and the facts fossilize into skeletons." An episode of her girlhood came back to her and she smiled. "Perhaps father was right; I may have hemiopia, after all."

She stood up from her seat and was about to leave the room when she heard the front door open, and in a second her husband's step.

Eden drew the portière aside and looked out in the hall. Usselex had his back to her. He was taking off his overcoat. She spoke to him and he turned at once, one arm still unreleased. At last he freed himself and came to her.

"You got my note, did you not?" he began. "I am sorry about this evening. Could you not go to Mrs. Manhattan's without me? Something always seems to turn up at the last moment."

"I hardly expected you so early," Eden answered. "I sent word to Laura." She was looking at her husband, but her husband was not looking at her. He seemed preoccupied and nodded his head abstractedly.

"Yes, yes," he muttered, with singular inappositeness. "Yes, of course. But there," he added and turned again to the door, "I must hurry."

"Whom were you with this afternoon?" Eden asked.

It was as though she had checked him with a rein. He stopped at once and glanced at her.

"Did you see me?" he inquired; and accepting her silence for answer he continued at once: "It's a long story; I have hardly time to tell it now."

Eden put her hand on his sleeve. "Tell it me," she pleaded.

For the moment he stood irresolute. "Tell me," she repeated, and moved back, motioning him to a chair.

Usselex took out his watch. "I must hurry," he said again. "But there," he added tenderly, "since you wish it, a moment lost is small matter, after all."

Again he glanced at her and hesitated as though expectant of a respite. Eden had her everyday air; outwardly she was calm, but something in her appearance, the twitch of an eyelid, the quiver of a nostril perhaps, revealed her impatience.

Usselex shrugged his shoulders, and for a second, with a gesture that was habitual to him, he plucked at his beard. "No," he repeated, "a moment is small matter, after all. H'm. Eden, some years ago I went abroad. During my absence a cashier whom I trusted, and whom I would trust again, speculated with money that passed through his hands. It was not until my return that I learned of the affair. But meanwhile, as is usual in such cases, he was on the wrong side of the market. The money which he had taken had to be accounted for. I had a partner then, and the cashier confessed the defalcation to him; it was the only thing he could do, and he promised, I believe, that if time were given him he would make good the loss. The amount after all was not large—fifteen thousand perhaps, or twenty at the outside. But my partner was not lenient. He came of a line of New England divines, and had, if I remember rightly, at one time contemplated studying for the ministry. In any event he was then an elder in some up-town Presbyterian church. But virtue is not amiable. Without so much as communicating with me he put the matter in the hands of the authorities, and when I returned the cashier was in Sing-Sing. Eden, you will hardly understand how sorry I was. He had a wife dependent on him—he had children. He had been with me longer than my partner had, and I liked him. Of the two I liked him the better. What he took I have never been able to view as a theft. It was what might be called a forced loan. Had I been here it would have been different; but my partner was obdurate. You see, the fault, if fault there were, was mine. The salary I gave him was small, and each day I allowed temptation to pass between his hands. People say that we should resist temptation. I agree with them; temptation should be resisted; but when a rich man preaches that sermon to the poor, he forgets that where temptation is vague to him it may be potent to his hearer. Oh, I don't mean to uphold derelictions, but to my thinking Charity is the New Testament told in a word. I think that forgiveness is the essence of the teaching of every founder of an enduring creed. However, that is not to the point. The fact remained, the cashier was sent to Sing-Sing, and since then I have done what I could to get him out. It was his wife that I was with to-day. Poor girl! I have been sorry for her; she is but little older than you, and she has had trials to bear such as might have sent another to worse than the grave." He paused, and plucking again at his beard, he looked down at the rug. Eden needed no assurance to feel that his words were heart-whole and sincere. She moved to where he stood and touched him on the arm.

"Don't tell me any more," she said, and as she spoke there came to her voice a tremulousness that was as unusual as it was sweet. "You must let me help her, too."

"Yes, Eden, that I will. It is good of you to speak that way. It is not only good, it is Edenesque. But let me tell you the rest. Governor Blanchford is in town. I went yesterday to the Buckingham, where he is stopping. He could only see me for a moment then, and this afternoon I went again with her. I am to dine with him this evening. When he returns to Albany I think the pardon will be signed." Again he paused and looked at his watch. "I must dress," he added; "will you forgive me—?"

"Forgive you!" she cried, "it is your turn, now: forgive me."

Usselex moved from her, her hand still in his, and when their arms were fully outstretched, he turned and holding her to him he kissed her on either cheek.

As he left the room Eden could have danced with delight. She ran to the piano and with one hand still gloved she struck out clear notes of joy. Presently, she too left the room, and prepared for dinner. When the meal was served she ate it in solitude, but the solitude was not irksome to her; it was populous with recovered dreams. Among the dishes that were brought her was one of terrapin, which she partook of with an art of her own; and subsequently, in a manner which it must have been a pleasure to behold, she nibbled at a peach—peaches and terrapin representing, as everyone knows, the two articles of food which are the most difficult to eat with grace.

Later, when the meal was done, Eden returned to the drawing-room. Mrs. Manhattan was unregretted. The summer had been fertile enough in entertainments to satiate her for a twelve-month. She had come and gone, eaten and fasted, danced and driven, with no other result than the discovery that the companionship of her husband was better than anything else. To her thinking he needed only an incentive to conquer the ballot. There was no reason why he should not leave Wall Street for broader spheres. She had met senators by the dozen, and he was wiser than them all. He might be Treasurer of State if he so willed, or failing that, minister to the Court of St. James. Even an inferior mission such as that to the Hague or to Brussels would be better than the Street. It was inane, she told herself, to pass one's life in going down town and coming up again merely that another million might be put aside. An existence such as that might be alluring to Jerolomon or Bleecker Bleecker, but for her husband there were other summits to be scaled.

And as Eden, prettily flushed by the possibilities which her imagination disclosed spectacular-wise for her own delight, sat companioned by fancies, determining, if incentive were necessary, that incentive should come from her, the portière was drawn aside and the butler announced Mr. Arnswald.

"I ventured to come in," he said, apologetically, "although I knew Mr. Usselex was not at home. I wanted——"

"One might have thought your evenings were otherwise occupied," Eden interrupted, a little fiercely. The intercepted note of the preceding evening rankled still. That the young man should receive a letter from a strange woman was, she admitted to herself, a matter which did not concern her in the slightest. But it was impertinent on his part to suffer that letter to be sent to him at her house.

"This evening, however, as you see——" he began blandly enough, but Eden interrupted him again.

"What did you think of it last night?" she asked, with the inappositeness that was peculiar to her.

"You are clairvoyant enough, Mrs. Usselex, to know untold what I thought. It was of that I wished to speak to you. It is rare that such an opportunity is given me."

"To hear Wagner?"

"No, not to hear Wagner particularly." He hesitated and looked down at his pointed shoes, and at the moment Eden for the life of her could not help thinking of a dissolute young god arrayed in modern guise. After all, she reflected, it is probably the woman's fault.

"No, not that," he continued, and looked up at her again, his polar-eyes ablaze with unexpected auroras. "Not that; but think what it is for a man to love a woman, to divine that that love is returned, and yet to feel himself as far from her as death is from life. Think what it must be for him to love that woman so well that he would not haggle over ten years, no, nor ten hundred years of years, could he pass an hour with her, and then by way of contrast to find himself suddenly side by side with her, listening to such music as we heard last night."

"Mr. Arnswald, you are out of your senses," Eden exclaimed. A suspicion had entered her mind and declined to be dismissed.

"Am I not?" he answered. "Tell me that I am. I need to be told it. Yet last night, for the first time, it seemed to me that perhaps all might still be well. It was hope that I found with you, Mrs. Usselex; it was more than hope, it was life."

And as his eyes rekindled, Eden told herself that his attitude could have but one signification.

"I'll not play Guinevere to your Lancelot," she murmured. And turning her back on him she left the room.

VI.

The following day was unstarred by any particular luncheon, or at least by none at which Eden was expected. Her own repast she consumed in solitude, and as she rose again from the table, Mrs. Manhattan was announced.

Mrs. Manhattan was a woman of that class which grows rarer with the days. She was very clever and knew how to appear absolutely stupid. According to the circumstances in which she was placed, she could be frivolous or sagacious, worldly, and sensible. In fact, all things to all men. Born in Virginia, a Leigh of Leighton, she had married a rich and popular New Yorker. After marriage, and on removing to Fifth Avenue, she had the tact to leave her accent and her family tree behind. Her husband's great-grandfather was lost in the magnificence of myth; her own figured in Burke. If Nicholas Manhattan had been a snob—which he was not—that fact would have constituted his sole grievance against her. But from Laura Leigh, of a North country descent and a feudal castle in Northumberland, never an allusion could be wrung. In marrying a New Yorker she espoused all New York, its customs, its prejudices, its morals, its vices, everything, even to the high pitch of its voice; and so well did she succeed in identifying herself with it and with its narrow localisms, that in a few years after her arrival, not to visit and be visited by Mrs. Nicholas Manhattan was to argue one's self out into the nethermost limbo of insignificance.

Had Mrs. Manhattan been any other than herself, Eden would have sent back some femininely prevaricatory excuse. She was enervated still by the emotions of the preceding day, and her desire for companionship was slight. But Mrs. Manhattan was not only Mrs. Manhattan, she was a woman for whom Eden entertained a quasi-filial, quasi-sororal affection. She went forward therefore at once, her hands outstretched to greet.

On ordinary occasions it was Mrs. Manhattan's custom to salute Eden with a kiss, but on this particular afternoon she contented herself with taking the outstretched hands in her own, holding Eden, as it were, at arms length.

"You abominable little beauty," she began, "what did you mean by leaving me in the lurch last night? I came here expecting to find you in bed with the doctor. *Mais pas du tout. Madame s'embellit à vu d'oeuil.*"

"Laura, dear," Eden answered, when they had found seats, "don't be annoyed at me. I wanted very much to come. But you know the proverb: man proposes——"

"—And woman accepts. Yes, I know; go on."

"Well, I simply couldn't help it."

"Couldn't help it! What do you mean by saying you couldn't help it? Don't sit there with your back to the light; I want to look at you. Eden, as sure as my name is Laura Leigh, something has gone wrong with you. What business have you, at your age, to have circles under your eyes?"

"Presumably because I was unable to get to your dinner. I am really sorry, Laura. Did you have many people?"

"Of course I didn't. Nicholas won't let me give large dinners. There were only eighteen of us. I suppose I could have got the Boltens to come and take your place. But then you know how people are. Unless you invite them a fortnight in advance they think they are asked to fill up—as they are. H'm! I was mad enough. Nicholas was to have taken you in, and by way of compensation you were to have had your old flame, Dugald Maule, on the other side of you. Parenthetically, it is my opinion that he loves you still—beyond the tomb, as they love in Germany. However, that is not to the point; the dinner was a failure. Afterwards we all went to the Amsterdams; all of us, that is, except Jones, who said he had an engagement, which meant I suppose, that he was not expected."

"Jones, the novelist?"

"Yes, Alphabet Jones. Personally he is as inoffensive as a glass of lemonade, but I can't bear his books. He uses words I don't understand, and tells of things that I don't want to. Nicholas, however, will have him."

And at the thought of her husband's tyranny, Mrs. Manhattan shrugged her shoulders and gazed complacently in her lap.

"Laura, I don't believe your dinner was a failure."

"Well, not exactly a failure perhaps, but it is always upsetting to have people at the last moment send word that they can't come. It is not only upsetting, it's dangerous. It takes the flavor of the soup away. It makes everything taste bad." And as Mrs. Manhattan said this she glared at Eden with the ferocity of an irritated Madonna. "Now tell me," she continued, "what was the matter with you?"

"Really, Laura, it was nothing. I can't tell you." She hesitated a second and into the corners of her exquisite mouth there passed a smile. "I saw my husband in a cab with—with——"

"A woman?"

Eden stared at her friend with the astonishment of a gomeril at a contortionist. The smile left her lips.

"Did you see him too?" she asked.

"Why, no, you little simpleton, I didn't see him; but I haven't got a husband of my own for nothing."

"Do you mean that your husband deceives you?"

"Deceives me? no, not a bit of it. He only thinks he does. Is that what has been the matter with you?"

"Laura——"

"And was it because you caught your husband in a cab that you couldn't come to dinner? But, heavens and earth! if other women were to act like you no one would even dare to attempt to entertain. As it is," Mrs. Manhattan grumbled to herself, "the Mayor ought to pass an ordinance on the subject. He has little enough to do in return for his double lamp-posts."

"No, Laura, how absurd you are!" Eden exclaimed. "John was detained on business."

"Ah! I see." And Mrs. Manhattan looked at her in a gingerly fashion out of the corner of one eye.

"Yes, he sent me word that he was detained on business and for me to send word to you."

"That was most thoughtful of him. And it was after you got the note that the cab episode occurred?"

"No, it was just before."

"Yes, yes, I can understand." Mrs. Manhattan paused a moment. To anyone else save Eden the pause would have been significant. "H'm," she went on, "business may mean other men's money, or it may mean other men's wives. I do hope, though, you were sensible enough not to mention anything about the lady and the cab."

"Oh, but indeed, I did. He explained the whole thing at once."

"From the cab window?"

"When he came back, I mean—in the evening."

"Some little time must have intervened."

"Yes, two hours, I should judge."

Mrs. Manhattan nodded. "Well," she said, with an air of profound sapience, "no man ever talks to a woman for two hours unless he keeps saying the same thing all the time."

"Laura, that is not like you. You know perfectly well that friendship can exist between a man and a woman without there being any thought of love-making."

"Oh, I know what you are going to say. But there is the difference between love and friendship. To those who have witnessed a bull-fight, the circus I hear is commonplace."

"You mean to imply that my husband was enjoying a bull-fight?"

"I don't mean anything of the sort. But what a way you have of reducing generalities to particulars! No, I don't mean that at all. I am speaking in the air. What I meant to imply was that love has consolations which friendship does not possess."

"Laura, you don't understand. It is not a question of that. This woman's husband has got into trouble and John was trying to get him out."

Mrs. Manhattan eyed her again in the same gingerly fashion as before. "He said that, did he?"

Eden nodded.

"I hope you pretended to believe him."

"Pretended! Why, I did believe him. I believed him at once."

"Yes, that's a good way." Mrs. Manhattan tormented the point of her nose reflectively. "I used to too," she added. "Now I simply don't see. That I find even better. It makes everything go so smoothly. No arguments, no recriminations, perfect peace. Nicholas, as you know, is the most delightful man in the world. I have the highest respect for him. If he took it into his head to leave the planet and me behind, I should feel it my duty as a Christian woman to see that the trappings of my woe were becoming to his memory. But—but, well, I should feel that I had been vaccinated. I should feel that a minor evil had protected me from a greater one. In other words, I would not marry again. It is my opinion, an opinion I believe which is shared by a good many other people, that a woman who marries a second time does not deserve to have lost her first husband. Now, as I say of Nicholas, I have the greatest respect for him. He is charming. I haven't the vaguest idea how he would get along without me. I do everything for him, but I am careful not to exact the impossible. We get along splendidly together. He makes the most elaborate efforts to throw dust in my eyes, and I aid him to the best of my ability, but I always know what he is up to. I can tell at a glance where he is in any affair. The moment he gives up his after-dinner cigar I can hear the fifes in the distance—he is making himself agreeable to someone with whom he intends to pass the evening. The second stage is when he comes in of an afternoon with a rose in his button-hole. That means that he has been sending flowers and that the siege is progressing. The third stage is when he begins to smoke again. That means that the castle has capitulated and further diplomacy is unnecessary. The fourth and final stage is when he says in an off-hand way, 'Laura, I saw some stones this afternoon at Tiffany's.' That means remorse and reward—remorse at his own wickedness, and reward for my non-interference. There is nothing in the world that a man appreciates more than that. Yes, I certainly do my duty. Nicholas, as you know, was a widower when I married him. By his first wife he had one child and a great deal to put up with. Whereas, now—why, Eden, what are you crying about?"

"I am not crying." In a moment Eden had choked back a sob. Her eyes flashed the more brilliant for their tears, but her voice had lost its former gentleness, it had grown vibrant and resolute. "Laura, if he has deceived me, I will leave him."

"If who has deceived you? Surely Nicholas——"

"Laura, I am in no mood for jest. Last night I believed my husband, to-day I do not. If I can get proof, I leave him."

"That is what we all say, but we don't."

"If he has deceived me——"

"Eden, how foolish you are! No, but, Eden, you are simply childish. You are sunshine one minute and tornado the next. Why, I haven't a doubt in the world but that Mr. Usselex was trying to get the cab-lady's husband out of trouble. I haven't the faintest doubt of it."

"Nor had I before you came."

"Oh, Eden, forgive me. What I said was idle chatter. There, do be your old sweet self again."

Eden stood up and pinioned her forehead with her hands. "I wonder," she exclaimed, "I wonder—Laura, do you know that it is of a thing like this that hatred comes?"

"My dear, I had no idea that you were so much in love."

But as she spoke there came into Eden's face an expression so new and unlike her own, that Mrs. Manhattan started. "Sit down," she said coaxingly. "Do sit down." She took the girl's hands in hers and drew her gently to the lounge on which she was seated. "Eden," she continued, after a moment, "between ourselves, I think you are—how shall I say?—a little—" And Mrs. Manhattan

touched her forehead and nodded significantly.

"I? Not a bit."

"So much the worse, then. It would be an excuse. Now listen to me. They say that when a woman gets to be thirty the first thing she does is to ignore her age, and that by the time she is forty it has escaped her memory entirely. I am not forty yet, but I am old enough—well, I am old enough to be wiser than you, and I say this—you can contradict it as much as you please, but I will say it all the same—you have more pride in yourself than love for your husband."

"Which means?"

"I mean this, that when pride gets the upper hand, love is bound to be throttled. In some, pride is a screen; behind it they rage at their ease: in others it is a bag of wind; prick it and behold, a tempest. With you, just at present, it is a screen; haven't I seen you torment your rings ever since I came in? Well, torment them, but for goodness sake don't change the screen into a balloon. There is nothing as bad form as that, and nothing as ineffectual. My dear, if you want to keep your husband, think of yourself not first, but last, or, if you can't think in that way, act as though you did."

"And be a hypocrite."

"Eden, you are impossible. Be a hypocrite? Why, of course you must be a hypocrite. Hypocrisy is Christianity's most admirable invention. Banish it, and what do you find? Not skeletons in the closet, but catacombs of distasteful things. No, Eden, be a hypocrite. We all are; everyone prefers it. There was a man once who got up in the morning with the idea of telling everybody the truth. By sunset he was safe in an asylum. People don't want the truth; they content themselves with sighing for it; they know very well that when they get in its way, it bites. It is vicious, truth is. It makes us froth at the mouth. If you haven't had the forethought to cuirass yourself with indifference, truth can cause a hydrophobia for which the only Pasteur is time. No, hypocrisy has had the sanction of pope and prelate. Let us hold to it; let us hold to what we may and not try to prove anything."

"What are you talking about then?"

"How irritating you are, Eden! I am talking about you. I am trying to give you some advice. No one gave me any. I had to gather it on the way. I come here, and finding you melancholy as a comic paper, I try to offer the fruit of two decades of worldly experience, and instead of thanking me, you ask what I am talking about." Mrs. Manhattan sank back in her ample folds and laughed. "Don't you have any tea in this house?"

"You are right, Laura; I am irritating, I am absurd." As she spoke, she left the lounge. The tragedy-air had departed. She rang the bell, gave the order for tea, and during the remainder of Mrs. Manhattan's visit, comported herself so sagaciously that she succeeded in casting dust in that lady's eyes in a manner which would have thrown that lady's husband into stupors of admiration.

When her friend at last decided to take herself and her experience away, Eden remained in the drawing-room. Down the adjacent corner she saw the sun decline. On the horizon it left an aigrette of gold. Then that disappeared. Day closed its window, and Night, that queen who reigns only when she falls, shook out the shroud she wears for gown.

How long Eden sat alone with her thoughts she could not afterwards recall. For some time she was conscious only of a speck of dust which Mrs. Manhattan had brought from the outer world and forgotten to remove. It was such a little speck that at first Eden had pretended not to see it, but when Mrs. Manhattan had been gone a few minutes it insisted on her attention. She could not help eying it, and the more closely she eyed it, the larger it grew. From dust it turned to dirt, from minim into mountain. And presently it obscured her sight and veiled her mind with shadows.

Strive as she might, she could not argue it away. She tried to reason with herself, as a neurosthene, aware of his infirmity, may reason with the phantasm which he himself has evoked. But this was a phantasm that no argument could coerce. Did she say, You are unreal, it answered, I am Doubt. At each effort she made to rout it, it loomed to greater heights.

In the tremor that beset her she groped in memory for a talisman. She recalled her husband's wooing of her, his attitude and indulgent strength. Yet had not Mrs. Manhattan implied that men are double-faced? She thought of his laborious days, yet had not Mrs. Manhattan defined business as often synonymous with other men's wives? She recalled his excuse and was mindful of Mrs. Manhattan's interpretation.

At each new effort the doubt increased, and still she kept arguing with herself, until suddenly she perceived that she had stopped thinking. Doubt was pushing her down into an abyss where all was dark, and still she struggled, and still she struggled in vain; she was sinking; strength was leaving her, for doubt is masterful, till with a start she felt that she was safe. It was not in memory she found a talisman, but in her heart. It was her love that worked the spell. Love, and confidence in him whose name she bore. The mountain dissolved into minim, the dirt into dust, and she took the speck and blew it back into the shadows from which it had come.

VII.

That evening Eden and her husband dined alone. But it was not till coffee was served and the servants left the room that either of them had an opportunity of exchanging speech on matters other than such as were of passing interest. For the rout which both were to attend that night Eden had already prepared. It was the initial Matriarch's of the season, and rumor had it that it was to be a very smart affair. On this occasion the waiters, it was understood, were to be in livery; and an attempt had been made to give the rooms something of the aspect and aroma which appertains to a private house. As a consequence those of the gentler sex who were bidden had given some thought to their frocks, while those who were not had garmented themselves in their stoutest mantles of indifference.

On receiving the large bit of cardboard on which the invitation was engraved, Eden had at first determined to word and dispatch a regret. Entertainments of that kind had ceased to appeal to her. At gatherings of similar nature which she attended she had long since divided the male element into the youths who wished to seem older than they looked, and the mature individuals who wished to appear younger than they were; while as for the women, they reminded her of Diogenes looking for a man. On receiving the invitation she had, therefore, determined to send a regret, but on mentioning the circumstance to her husband he had expressed the desire that she should accept. He liked to have her admired, and moreover, though the function itself might be tiresome, still she owed some duty to society, and there were few easier ways in which that duty could be performed. Accordingly an acceptance was sent, and as a reward of that heroism Usselex had brought her a plastron of opals.

That plastron she now wore. Her gown, which was cut a trifle lower on the back than on the neck, was of a hue that suggested the blending of sulphur and of salmon. Her arms were cased in *Suède*, into which she had rolled that part of the glove which covers the hand. Save for the wedding-token her fingers were ringless. She had nothing about her throat. But from shoulder to shoulder, from breast to girdle, was a cuirass of gems, flecked with absinthe and oscillant with flame. It was barbaric in splendor, Roman in beauty; it startled and captivated. And in it Eden looked the personified spirit of Bysance, a dream that had taken form. Her husband let his eyes have all their will of her. Even the butler was dazzled.

During the progress of the meal the presence of that person and of his underlings prevented any conversation of reportable interest. But while the courses were being served Eden noticed that her husband was in an unusually sprightly mood. He touched on one topic of the day, presently on another, and left that for a third. To each he gave a new aspect. It was as though he were tossing crystal balls. Now, when an educated man is not a pedant he can in discoursing about nothing at all exert a very palpable influence. Mr. Usselex talked like a philosopher who has seen the world. To many a woman there is nothing more wearisome than the conversation of a man who has nothing to desire and nothing to fear. That man is usually her husband. But with Eden it was different. She listened with the pleasure of a convalescent. She was just issuing from the little nightmare of the afternoon, and as he spoke, now and then she interrupted with some fancy of her own; but all the while deep down in the fibres of her being she felt a smart of self-reproach that mingled with exultation. Her suspicions had vanished. They had been born of the dusk and creatures of it. And she looked down through the opals into her heart and over at her husband and smiled.

The butler and his underlings had departed. The meal was done. Usselex smiled too. He left his seat and went behind her. He drew her head back, bent over, and kissed her on the lips; then mirroring his eyes in hers, he kissed her again, drew a chair to her side, and took her hand in his.

"Look at me, Eden," he said. "I love your eyes. Speak to me. I love your voice. They say that at twenty a man loves best. They are wrong. Youth is inconstant. It is with age a man learns what love can be. Do you not think I know? Look at me and tell me. Eden, joy frightens. Sometimes I wonder that I had the courage to ask you to be my wife. Sometimes I fear you think me too old. Sometimes I fear you may regret. But you must never regret. Any man you might have met could be more attractive than I, but no one could care for you more; no one. Tell me; you believe that, do you not?"

And Eden, turning her head with the motion of a swan, answered, "I know it."

"Eden," he continued, "my life has not been pleasant. I have told you little of it. In the lives of everyone there are incidents that are best left buried. If I have been reticent it has not been from lack of confidence; it has been because I feared to distress you. For years I did not understand; the reason of pain is seldom clear. At times I thought my strength overtaxed. I accused fate; it had been wilful to me. It had beckoned me to pleasant places; when I reached them the meadows disappeared, the intervalles were quagmires, and the palace I had espied was a prison, with a sword for bolt. I accused justice as I had accused fate. Eden, men are not always sincere. There are people who do wrong, who injure, wantonly, in sport. And so I accused justice: I had expected it to be human; but justice is straight as a bayonet, and her breasts are of stone. It was long before I understood, but when I saw you I did. What I had suffered was needful; it was a preparation for you. No, justice is never human, but sometimes it is divine."

He had been speaking in a monotone, his voice sinking at times into a whisper, as though he feared some other than herself might hear his words. Eden's hand still lay within his own, and now he stood up and led her, waist-encircled, to the outer room. There they found other seats,

and for a moment both were silent.

"If I have not questioned you," Eden said, at last, "it has been for a woman's reason. I am content. Had you a grief, I would demand to share it with you. It would be my right, would it not? But of what has gone before I prefer to remain in ignorance. It is not that I am incurious. It is that I prefer to think of your life as I think of my own, that its beginning was our wedding-day. I too am some times afraid. There are things of which I also have been reticent. I remember once thinking that to be happy was a verb that had no present tense. I do not think so now," she added, after a moment; and to her exquisite lips the smile returned. "There are so many things I want to tell," she continued. "Before I met you I thought myself in love. Oh, but I did, though. And it was not until after I had known you that I found that which I had taken for love was not love at all. How did I know? Well—you see, because that is not love which goes. And that went. It was for the man I cared, not the individual. At the time I did not understand, nor did I until you came. Truly I don't see why I should speak of this. Every girl, I fancy, experiences the same thing. But when you came life seemed larger. You brought with you new currents. Do you know what I thought? People said I married you for money. I married you because—what do you suppose, now? Because I loved you? But at that time I told myself I had done with love. No, it was not so much for that as because I was ambitious for us both. It was because I thought Wall Street too small for such as you. It was because I discerned in you that power which coerces men. It was because I believed in the future; it was because I trusted you. Yes, it was for that, and yet this afternoon—What is it, Harris?"

A servant had entered the room, bearing a letter on a tray.

"A letter for you, sir," he said.

Usselex took the note, opened the envelope, which he tossed on the table, and possessed himself of the contents.

"Is the messenger waiting?" he asked.

"Yes, sir."

"Very good. Say I will be there immediately."

The man bowed and left the room.

"I am sorry, Eden—"

"What is it?"

"Nothing of any moment—a matter of business to which I must attend." He glanced at the clock. "It is after ten," he added. "You will not want to leave for Delmonico's before half-past eleven, will you? Very good; I will be back long before then." He had risen from his seat, and now he bent over and took her hand in his. "I am sorry I have to go. It is so seldom we have an evening together. And I had counted on this."

Eden raised a finger warningly. "If you are not back in time," she said, "I will send for Arnswald and go with him."

"I can trust him with you," he answered, and left the room. In a moment he returned, hat in hand. "By the way, Eden, I forgot to ask—you have sent out cards, have you not?"

"Yes, the world is informed that Mrs. John Usselex is at home on Saturdays."

"Would you mind sending that announcement to some one whom you don't know? It's just for the civility of the thing."

"Certainly. Who is it?"

"A Mrs. Feverill."

"Feverill? Mrs. Feverill." Eden contracted her eyebrows. "Where have I heard that name before?"

"I don't think you have ever heard it."

Eden laughed. "She wears blue velvet, I am sure; but I will send the card. Where does she live?"

Usselex bent over and touched her forehead with his lips. "That is good of you," he said. "She will take it very kindly." And with that he moved to the door.

"But what is the address?" Eden called after him.

"The Ranleigh," he answered; and from the hall he added, in a louder tone, "I will be back in less than an hour."

"The Ranleigh," she repeated to herself. "The Ranleigh!" And then suddenly the wall of the room parted like a curtain; to her ears came a cry of violins, dominated and accentuated by a blare of brass. Mrs. Manhattan was at her elbow. Behind her was Jones; beneath was a woman, her face turned to hers. She caught the motion of Mrs. Manhattan's fan. Beyond, in a canvas forest, stood a man, open-mouthed, raising and lowering his right arm at regular intervals. And between the shiver of violins and the shudder of trumpets, she heard some one saying, "Mrs. Feverill, that is—rather fly. Stops at the Ranleigh." At once the music swooned. The opera-house dissolved into

mist, and Eden was in a carriage, eying through the open window the cut of a passer's gown. In her lap were some flowers; she raised them to her face, and as she put them down again, a cab drove past, bearing her husband and the woman who was considered fly. And this was the woman he wished her to receive! She caught and pinioned her forehead in her hands. In the distance the shadow of the afternoon loomed again, but this time more monstrous and potent than before. And nearer and nearer it came—blacker than hate and more appalling than shame; in a moment it would be on her; she would be shrouded in it for evermore, and no defense—not one.

"No, no," she murmured. Her hands left her forehead. She clutched her throat as though to tear some invisible grasp away. "No, no," she murmured, "it cannot be."

"Look at me, Eden," some one was saying; "look at me; I love your eyes. Youth is inconstant. It is with age—"

It was her husband reassuring her even in his absence. "Speak to me; I love your voice." And memory, continuing its office of mercy, served as ægis and exorcised advancing night. In her nervousness at the parried attack, she left her seat and paced the room, the opals glittering on her waist. "But he told me," she mused, "he told me that the woman's husband was in trouble—that he was endeavoring to aid them both. What did I hear when I first met him? There was a clerk or someone in his office, a man whom he trusted who deceived him, who was imprisoned, and to whose people he then furnished means for support. It is criminal for me to doubt him as I have. Do I not know him to be generous? have I not found him sincere?"

She shook out a fold of her frock impatiently. "A child frightened at momentary solitude was never more absurd than I." For a little space she continued her promenade up and down the room, leaving at each turn some fringe of suspicion behind. And presently the entire fabric seemed to leave her. To the corners of her mouth the smile returned. She went back to the sofa and was about to resume her former seat when her eyes fell on the envelope which her husband had tossed on the table. Mechanically she picked it up and glanced at the superscription. The writing was thin as hair, but the lettering was larger than is usual, abrupt and angular. To anyone else it would have suggested nothing particular, save, perhaps, the idea that it had been formed with the point of a tack; but to Eden it was luminous with intimations. Into the palms of her hands came a sudden moisture, the color left her cheeks, for a second she stood irresolute, the envelope in her trembling hold, then, as though coerced by another than herself, she ran to a bell and rang it.

In a moment the butler appeared. To conceal her agitation Eden had gone to the piano. There were some loose sheets of music on the lid and these she pretended to examine. "Is that you, Harris?" she asked, without turning her head. "Harris, that man that brought the note for Mr. Usselex this evening was the one that came on Monday with the note for Mr. Arnswald, was it not?"

"I beg pardon, ma'am."

Eden reconstructed the question and repeated it.

"It was a young person, ma'am," Harris answered. "A lady's maid, most likely. She was here before on Monday evening, just before dinner, ma'am. She brought a letter and said there was no answer. I gave it to Mr. Usselex."

"To Mr. Arnswald, you mean."

"No, ma'am; it was for Mr. Usselex."

Eden clutched at the piano. Through the sheet of music which she held she saw that note again. The handwriting was identical with the one on the envelope. But each word it contained was a separate flame, and each flame was burning little round holes in her heart and eating it away. It was very evident to her now. She had been tricked from the first. She had been lied to and deceived. It behooved her now to be very cool. It was on business indeed that he had left her! Unconsciously she recalled Mrs. Manhattan's aphorism about business and other men's wives, and to her mouth, which the smile had deserted, came a sneer.

He is with her now, she told herself; well, let him be. In a sudden gust of anger she tore the sheet of music in two, and tossing it from her, turned.

At the door the butler still stood, awaiting her commands.

"You may go," she said, shortly. The shadow which twice that day she had eluded was before her. But she made no effort now to escape. It was welcome. She eyed it a moment. Her teeth were set, her muscles contracted. Then grasping it as Vulcan did, she forged it into steel.

About her on either side were wastes of black, and in the goaf, by way of clearing, but one thing was discernible, the fealty of Adrian. To save her from pain he had taken the letter on himself; he had accepted her contempt that he might assure her peace of mind. Through the dismal farce which had been played at her expense his loyalty constituted the one situation which was deserving of praise. With a gesture she dismissed her husband; it was as though he had ceased to exist. It was not him that she had espoused; it was a figure garbed in fine words. She had detected the travesty, the mask had fallen, with the actor she was done. She had never been mated, and now she was divorced. And as she stood, her hands clenched and pendant, the

currents of her thought veering from master to clerk, the portière furthestmost from her was drawn aside, the butler appeared an instant in the doorway, he mumbled a name, Dugald Maule entered the room, and the portière fell back.

"I made sure of finding you," he announced jauntily, as he approached.

He took her hand in his and raised it to his lips. In his button-hole was a flower, and in his breath the odor of *Crème de Menthe*. It was evident that he had just dined. "Your man tells me that Mr. Usselex is not at home," he continued. "I fancied he might be going to the assembly too. I see that you are. You look like a queen of old time. No, but you are simply stunning."

He stepped back that he might the better enjoy the effect. Eden had sunk on the lounge again. In and out from her skirt a white slipper, butterflyed with gold, moved restlessly.

"But you are pale," he added. "What is it?" He had scanned her face—its pallor was significant to him; but it was the nervousness of the slipper that prompted the question. To his thinking there was nothing more talkative than the foot of a pretty woman.

Eden shrugged her shoulders. "I didn't expect you," she said; "I am sure that I wouldn't have received you if I had."

"Ah, that is hardly gracious now."

"Besides, your reputation is deplorable."

"No one has any reputation, nowadays," Maule answered, with the air of a man describing the state of the weather. "You hear the most scandalous things about everyone. Who has been talking against me? A woman, I wager. Do you know what hell is paved with?"

"Not with your good intentions, I am positive."

"It is paved with women's tongues. That is what it is paved with. What am I accused of now?"

"As if I knew or cared. In my opinion you are depraved, and that is sufficient."

"Why do you call me depraved? You are not fair. Depravity is synonymous with the unnatural. Girls in short frocks don't interest me. Never yet have I loitered in the boudoir of a cocotte. Corydon was not a gentleman whom I would imitate. Neither was Narcissus. On the other hand, I like refined women. I have an unquestionable admiration for a pretty face. What man whose health is good has not? If capacity for such admiration constitutes depravity, then depraved I am." He paused. "H'm," he muttered to himself, "there's nothing of the Joseph about me."

But he might have continued his speech aloud. Eden had ceased to hear, her thoughts were far away. He looked at her inquiringly.

"Something is the matter," he said at last. "What has happened?"

Eden aroused herself ever so little from her reverie. "Nothing," she answered. "I wish you would go away."

"Something *is* the matter," he insisted. "Tell me what is troubling you. Who is there to whom you can turn more readily than to me? Eden, you forget so easily. For months I was at your side. And abruptly, a rumor, a whisper, a wind that passes took you from me. Eden, *I* have not changed. Nor have you ceased to preside over my life. It is idle and useless enough, I know. With your aid it would have been less valueless, I think; but such as it is, it is wholly yours. Tell me, what it is that troubles you."

And Eden, influenced either by the caress of the words or that longing which in moments of mental anguish forces us to voice the affliction, though it be but to a wall, looked in his face and answered:

"A hole has been dug in my heart, and in that hole is hate."

"Hate? Why, hate is a mediæval emotion; you don't know what it means." And as he spoke he told himself she was mad.

"Do I not? Ah, do I not?" She beat a measure on her knee with her fingers, and her eyes roamed from Maule to the ceiling and then far into space. "There is one whom I think of now; could I see him smitten with agony such as no mortal ever felt before, his eyes filled with spectres, his brain aflame—could I see that and know it to be my work, I should lie down glad and willing, and die of delight."

She stood up and turned to him again. "Do I not know what hatred means?"

"Eden, you understand it so well that your conception of love must be clearer still."

"Love, indeed!" She laughed disdainfully. "Why, love is a fever that ends with a yawn. Love! Why, men used to die of love. Now they buy it as they buy their hats, ready-made."

"Then I am in that fever now—Hush! here is your husband. The tenor wasn't half bad, I admit. Mr. Usselex, I am glad to see you."

Maule had risen at Usselex's entrance and made a step forward to greet him. "I stopped on my way to Delmonico's," he added, lightly. "I made sure you were both going."

"Yes," Usselex answered. "The carriage is at the door now. We can give you a lift if you care to."

He turned to Eden. "Shall I ring for your wrap?"

For one second Eden looked her husband straight in the eyes. And for one second she stood dumb, impenetrable as Fate, then gathering the folds of her dress in one hand, she answered in a tone which was perfectly self-possessed, "I have changed my mind," and swept from the room.

VIII.

On reaching her room Eden bolted the door. The maid rapped, but she gave no answer. Without was a whistling wind that parodied her anger. For a moment she looked through the darkness for that lighthouse which is Hope, but presumably she looked in vain. Then there came another rap, and she heard her husband's voice. Misery had offered her its arm, and she was silent. Her husband rapped again, entreating speech with her, and still she made no answer. Presently she caught the sound of retreating footsteps. She removed the opals, disrobed, undid her hair, and accepting the proffered arm, she took Misery for bedfellow.

It was hours before she slept. But at last sleep came. In its beneficence it remained until the morning had gone; then at noon-day it left her, and she started with a tremor like to that which besets one who awakes from a debauch. The incidents of the preceding days paraded with flying standards before her. They were victors indeed. "*Væ soli!*" they seemed to shout. They had been pitiless in their assault, and now they exulted at her defeat. They jeered at their captive; and Eden, with that obsession which captives know, thought only of release. In all the chartless future, freedom was the one thing for which she longed. Her wounds were many; they had depleted her strength; but in freedom is a balm that cures. Her strength might be irrevocable and the cicatrices not to be effaced, yet give her that balm, and come what sorrow could. As for resignation, the idea of it did not so much as visit her. Resignation is a daily suicide, and she had not enough to outlast the night.

The hours limped. The afternoon was on the wane, and still she toyed with sorrow until suddenly she bethought herself of the need of immediate action. Usselex would presently return, but when he came again to her room, he should find it empty. At once, then, she made her preparations, and telling the startled maid to complete them, and to follow with the boxes to her father's house, she started out on foot, her wardrobe packed, and ready for removal.

As Eden hurried through the streets, she was conscious only that freedom was her goal. Everything else she put from her. It was to her father she turned; it was through him that freedom would be obtained; and as she hurried she pictured the indignation with which he would hear her tale. He, indeed, was one on whom she could lean. Whatever other men might be, he, at least was above reproach. Had he not for twenty years been faithful to a memory. Surely her mother when she lived must have enjoyed that gift of gifts, perfect confidence and trust.

So far back in the past as her memory extended she saw him always considerate, gentle of manner, courteous to inferiors, deferential to women, unassuming, and exemplary of life. In very truth there was none other in the world like him. And when at last she entered his house she told herself she was safe, and when the door closed, that she was free.

She knew without inquiry where to find him, and hastened at once to the library, breathless when she reached his chair. He had been dozing over a book, but at the rustle of her gown, he started and rubbed his eyes.

"It's good of you to come," he said, by way of greeting. "Why, Eden, I haven't seen you for two days. Sit down there and let me look at you. It's odd; I was going to you after the funeral. You know about General Meredith, don't you? He went off like that. He is to be buried this afternoon."

Mr. Menemon stood up and hunted for a match with which to light a lamp. "Yes," he continued, "he was only ill for twenty-four hours. Think of that, now! To tell you the truth, I haven't been very bright myself. I wanted to speak to you about it. All last winter I was more or less under the weather, and for some time I have been planning a trip abroad. Now that you have an establishment of your own, Eden, you won't want me." And as he said this, he smiled.

"Father, I have more need of you than ever."

"Yes," he answered, "I was jesting. I know you will miss me; but I will come back with the violets."

He had succeeded in lighting the lamp and, still smiling, he turned and looked at her. "The father-in-law element," he continued, and then stopped abruptly, amazed at the expression of his daughter's face. "What is it, Eden?" he asked at last.

"If you go abroad, I go with you."

For a moment he eyed her, as though seeking, untold, to divine the meaning of her words.

"Nothing has gone wrong, has it?" he asked.

"He has deceived me."

"Usselex?"

"Who else is there whose deception I would notice?"

"You are mistaken, Eden; it is my fault; he consulted me in the matter——"

"He consulted *you*? But how is such a thing possible. He never could have consulted you, and if he had you would not have listened."

"Ah! but I did though. Between ourselves I thought it not uninteresting. After all, it was not his fault. I thought it unadvisable that you should learn of it before marriage, and afterwards, well, afterwards, it was immaterial whether you did or whether you didn't."

"Father, either it is not you that speak, or I am demented."

"There, my dear, don't take it so seriously. I can't call it an everyday matter, of course, but such things do happen, and as I said before, a man's a man for all of that. If he said nothing it was because—well, Eden, how could he? Ask yourself, how could he?"

"You knew of this before my marriage and you permitted the marriage to take place?"

"Well—er, yes, Eden. Frankly now, it was a difficult matter to discuss with you. You see, it was this way: a young girl like yourself, brought up as you have been, is apt to have prejudices which men and women of the world do not always share. And this is a case in point. Even now that you are married I can understand your disapproval, but——"

"Disapproval! Is that what you call it? Have you no other term? Father, it seems to me that you are worse than he. Had anyone told me that you could countenance such a thing I would have denied his sanity." She hid her face in her hands and moaned dumbly to herself, "I am desolate," she murmured, "I am desolate, indeed."

"No, Eden, not that, not that. Eden, listen to me; there, if you only listen to me a moment. Eden, it is not a thing that I countenance, nor is it one of which I approve. But the fault is not his. It is in the nature of some women that such things should be. It is a thing to be deplored, to be overlooked. The old law held that the sins of the father should be visited on the son; but we are more liberal now. Besides, it is part of the past; what use is there——"

"Part of the past? I saw him with her the day before yesterday, and——"

"Why, she is dead."

"Father, of whom are you speaking?"

"Of his mother, of course; and you?"

"I am speaking of his mistress, whom he wishes your daughter to entertain."

"Eden, it is impossible. I misunderstood you. What you say is absurd. Usselex is incapable of such infamy."

"He is, then, and he has the capacity to have me share it too."

"But tell me, what grounds have you for saying——"

"On Monday I was at the opera. In the stalls was a woman that stared at me——"

"Many another I am sure did that."

"And the next afternoon I saw him with her. He sent me a note saying he was detained on business. When he returned he made some lame excuse, which I, poor fool, believed. Previously I had intercepted a letter——"

"A letter?"

"Yes, a letter such as those women write. He pretended it was not for him, and for the moment I believed that too. Oh, I have been credulous enough."

"Eden, you must let it pass."

"Not I."

"Ah, but Eden, you must; you must let it pass. I will speak to Usselex."

"That you may, of course; but as for me, I never will."

"My child, you are so wrong. What can I say to you? Eden——"

"Father, he has deceived me. Wantonly, grossly, and without excuse. Speak to him again, I never will——"

"Eden——"

"—And if I ever see him it will be in court. It was for victims like myself that courts were invented."

At this speech Mr. Menemon stood up again, and paced the room; his head was bent, and he had the appearance of one in deep perplexity. From time to time he raised his hand and stroked his back hair. And as he walked Eden continued, but her tone was gentler than before:

"Father, you can never know. As you say, there are things of which it is not well to speak. But let me tell you: In marrying I thought my husband like yourself, one whom I could believe, whom I could honor, and of whom I should be proud. He was too old for me, people said. But my fear was that I should seem too young for him. Others insisted that I knew nothing of him, and all the while I hoped that he would not find me lacking. I wanted to aid, to assist. I was ambitious. He seemed possessed of the fibres of which greatness is the crown. I saw before him a future, a career which history might note. I dreamed that with the wealth which he had acquired and the power that was in him, he could win recognition of men and fame of time. It would be pleasant, I thought, to be the helpmate of such an one. How did it matter that he was an alien if I were at home with him? Father, I was proud of him. I was glad to be younger than he. What better guide could I find? Yes, I was glad of his years, for I had brought myself to think that when two people equally young and equally favored fall in love, it is nature that is acting in them. Whereas I loved not the man, but the individual, and that, I told myself, that is the divine. That is what I thought before marriage, and now I detect him in a vulgar intrigue. Is it not hideous? It took him six months to walk through my illusions, and one hour to dispel them. See, I have nothing left. Nothing," she added pensively, "except regret."

She remained silent a little space, then some visitation of that renegade Yesterday that calls himself To-morrow, seemed to stir her pulse.

"Father," she pleaded, "tell me; I can be free of him, can I not? You will keep him from me? you will get me back my liberty again?"

Mr. Menemon had resumed his former place at the table, and sat there, his head still bent. But at this appeal he looked up and nodded abstractedly, as though his attention were divided between her and someone whom he did not see.

"You are overwrought," he said. "Were you yourself, you would not speak in this fashion about nothing."

A sting could not have been more sudden in its effect. She gasped; a returning gust of anger enveloped her. She sprang from her seat as though impelled by hidden springs. "Nothing?" she cried. "You call it nothing to unearth a falsehood where you awaited truth, treachery where honesty should be, deceit instead of candor! You call it nothing to harbor a knight and discover him a knave, to give your trust unfalteringly and find that it has reposed on lies! Nothing to be jockeyed of your love, cozened of your faith! To wage a war with blacklegs and mistake that war for peace! Do you call it nothing to drown a soul, to make it a sponge of shadows that can no longer receive the light? Is it nothing to hold out your arms and be embraced by Judas? Is it nothing to be loyal and be gammoned for your innocence? Is it nothing to be juggled with, to be gulled, cheated, and decoyed? Is it nothing to grasp a hawser and find it a rope of sand? To pursue the real and watch it turn into delusion? Nothing to see the promise vanish in the hope? Is it nothing to take a mirage for a landscape, nothing to be hoodwinked of your confidence, to see high noon dissolve into obscurest night, a diamond into pinchbeck? Tell me, is it nothing to have trust, sincerity, and love for heritage, and wake to find that you have pawned them to a Jew? Do you think it nothing to be mated to a living perjury, a felony in flesh and blood? Is this what you call nothing? Is this it? Then tell me what something is."

For a moment she stared at her father, her lips still moving, her small hands clenched, then, exhausted by the vehemence of her speech, she sank back again into the chair which she had vacated.

"No, Eden, not that," her father answered; but he spoke despondently, with the air of a man battling against a stream, and conscious of the futility of the effort. "No, not that; you misunderstand. I mean this: you have confounded suspicion with proof. Whoever this woman is, Usselex's relations with her may be irreproachable. Mind you, I don't say they are; I say they may be. I will question him, and he will answer truthfully."

"Truthfully? You expect him to answer truthfully. In him nothing is true, not even his lies."

"Eden, I will question him. If it is as you expect, he will tell me and you will forgive."

"Forgive? yes, it is easy to forgive, but forget, never! Besides, he will not tell the truth; he will deceive you, as he has deceived me."

"No, Eden," Mr. Menemon answered, "you are wrong." For a moment he hesitated and glanced at her. "I suppose," he continued, "I may tell you now. Perhaps it will help to strengthen your confidence."

Again he hesitated; but presently something of his former serenity seemed to return. "H'm," he went on, "it's a long story and an odd one. Previous to your engagement, Meredith was here. I wish, instead of lying across the square in a coffin, he could be here now. However, he came to see me one day. I happened to mention Usselex's name, and he told me certain rumors about him. The next afternoon I went to Usselex on the subject. 'I have already written to you on the matter,' he said; and sure enough, when I got back here, I found the letter waiting. Would you like to see it?"

Eden tossed her head. What had the letter to do with her?

"I will read it to you, then."

Mr. Menemon left his chair, went to a safe that stood in a corner, unlocked it, and after a fumble of a moment, drew out a manuscript, which he unfolded, and then resumed his former seat.

"It is not very long," he said, apologetically, and he was about to begin to read it aloud when Eden interrupted him.

"Tell me what is in it, if you must!" she exclaimed; "but spare me his phrases."

She had risen again and was moving restlessly about the room. Her father coughed in sheer despair.

"Well, I will tell it to you," he said. "But Eden, do sit down. Do wait at least until I can give you the gist of what he wrote."

"Go on; go on. Nothing matters now."

Hesitatingly and unencouraged, half to his daughter, and half to some invisible schoolmaster, whose lesson he might have learned by rote, Mr. Menemon fluttered the letter and sought some prefatory word.

"You see, Eden," he began, "this was sent me just before he spoke to you, and just after he had acquainted me of his intentions. You understand that, do you not?"

"Go on," she repeated.

"Well, from what I had heard, and what he practically substantiates here, Usselex is a trifle out of the common run. His earliest recollections are of Cornwall, some manufacturing town there; let me see—" and the old man fumbled with the letter and with his glasses. "Yes, yes; Market Dipborough, to be sure. Well, he was brought up there by his mother, who was of Swiss extraction, and by his father, who was at the head of a large shoe factory. I say his father and mother; but—However, he was brought up there. Well, to make a long story short, it appears that he was given a very good education; his people evidently were people of some means, and it was expected that he would study for the bar. He was put at some public school or other, the name is immaterial, and when he was on the point of entering Oxford, the Swiss lady or her husband, I forget which—at any rate, somebody died. Do you follow me, Eden? Well, he then learned that instead of being the son of the people by whom he had been brought up, he was not their son at all. And now comes the curious part of it. It seems that the Swiss lady had been, in years gone by, companion or governess, or something of that sort, to the Grand-Duchess Thyra of Gothland, who, as you know, became the wife of the King of Suabia. She died, by the way, a year or two ago. However, the Swiss lady was her companion or something of the kind, and in consequence was placed in close relations with her. In fact, she was, I suppose, what you might call a confidante. In any event, the Grand-Duchess happened to have for music-teacher a good-looking young German who took her fancy. The result of it all was that the Swiss lady agreed to pretend that the offspring was her own, and was handsomely rewarded for her pains. She left Gothland with the child, and it was not until she died that Usselex learned that instead of being her son, he was grandson of the Emperor. He had the bar-sinister, of course, but the ancestry was there all the same. I don't know that I or any other man would envy him it; but perhaps it is better than none. However, as soon as Usselex learned the facts, he packed up and came over here. Now you have that part of his existence in a nutshell. What do you say to it?" And Mr. Menemon coughed again, and glanced inquiringly at his daughter.

"I say he is so base I might have known he was of royal blood."

"Eden, you are singularly unjust."

"But what does his birth matter to me?" she cried. "It was not for the presence or absence of forefathers that I put my hand in his. It was for the man himself, for what he seemed to me, and when I find that I have been mistaken in him, when in return for my love I get deceit, when he leaves me for another woman, and has the infamy to ask me to receive that woman, then I say, that whether he be the son of a serf or the son of a king, our ways divide—"

"Eden—"

"Yes, our ways divide."

Urged by her irritation, she still paced the room, graceful as a leopard is, and every whit as unconstrained. But now, abruptly she halted before a portrait that hung from the wall. For a moment she gazed at it, then pointing to it with arm outstretched, she turned.

"Tell me," she asked, her sultry eyes flashing with vistas of victory. "Tell me how my mother would have acted, had such an indignity been put on her. Tell me," she repeated, "and through your knowledge of her, so will I act. Yes," she added, and then paused, amazed at the expression of her father's face. It was as though some unseen hand had stabbed him from behind. The mouth twitched in the contraction of sudden pain, the nostrils quivered, and he bowed his head; then, his eyes lowered and turned from her, he answered in a voice that trembled just a little and yet was perfectly distinct:

"It was such a thing as this that marred your mother's life; let it not mar your own."

For the moment Eden could not credit her hearing. The words seemed meaningless. She had caught them in a crescendo of stupor. "It is impossible," she murmured. She stared at her father, her eyes dilated, her heart throbbing, and every sense alert. "It is impossible," she repeated, beneath her breath. And as she stared, her father's attitude accentuated the words, reiterating that the avowal which had been wrung from him was not the impossible, but the truth. No, there was no mistake. She had heard aright, and presently, as the understanding of it reached her, she moved back and away from him. For the first time that day the tears came to her eyes. "I have drunk of shame," she sobbed; "now let me drink of death."

IX.

For some time father and daughter were silent. Eden suppressed her sob, and Mr. Menemon fidgeted nervously in his chair. The funeral across the way, he told himself, would be gayer than this, and for the moment he regretted that he had not taken time by its bang and gone to other lands. Grief was always distressing to him, and the grief of his daughter was torment. The idea that Usselex had been derelict, he put from him. He had an interpretation of his own for the incidents on which he had been called to sit in judgment. Trivialities such as they left him unaffected. His enervation came of an inability to cope with Eden. She treated an argument like a cobweb. And besides, had he not in a spasm of discouragement disclosed a secret which for two decades he had kept close-locked and secure?

Truly, if Eden had come to him with a valid complaint, he would have taken arms in an instant. He was by no means one to suffer a child of his to be treated with contumely. The bit of *lignum vitæ* which served him for a heart was all in all for her. A real grievance would have enraged him more than anyone else. In spite of his apparent indifference there was much of the she-wolf in his nature. He would have fought for Eden, he would have growled over her, and shown his false teeth at any assailant that might happen that way. But of danger there was not a trace. Listen as he might he could not catch the faintest rumor of advancing foes. And because she had met her husband in the street, because a woman had stared at her and some idiotic note had come into her hands, high-noon must change to night, and laughter into tears.

"She is her mother all over again," the old gentleman muttered. And in his discomfiture he regretted the funeral, the confidence that he had made, and fidgeted nervously in his chair.

And as he fidgeted, glancing obliquely the while at his daughter, and engrossed in the torturing pursuit of some plea that should show her she erred, and bring her to her senses again, Eden's earlier griefs crackled like last year's leaves. In this new revelation they seemed dead indeed. Of her mother she had not the faintest recollection; but there had been moments when a breath, a perfume, something which she had just read, a sudden strain, the intoning of a litany, an interior harmony perhaps, or an emotion, had brought to her a whisper, the sound of her own name; and with it for one second would come the shadowy reminiscence of an anterior caress. For a second only would it remain with her, departing as abruptly as it had come, but leaving her to stroll for hours thereafter through lands where dreams come true. And at such times she was wont to feel that could she but clutch that fleeting second and detain it long enough to catch one further glimpse of the past, the key of memory would be in it, and the past unlocked. But that second was never to be detained; it was from her father only that she was able to learn something of that which was nearest to her heart, and again and again she had sat with him listening to anecdotes, absorbing repetitions and familiar details with a nascent interest and a delight that no other chronicles could arouse. On the subject of her mother she had indeed been insatiable; she had wished to know everything, even to the gowns she preferred and the manner in which she had arranged her hair; and her father had taken evident pleasure in telling of one who had been wife to him and mother to her, and whose life she now learned for the first time he had marred.

Mr. Menemon meanwhile was still in pursuit of the plea; but nothing of any cogency presented itself. In truth he had builded better than he knew. Anger burns itself out; already its force was spent, and the revelation he had made had affected his daughter like a douche. In his ignorance, however, the safest and surest course that occurred to him was to hold his tongue, send for Usselex, and leave him to settle the matter as best he might. This course he was about to adopt, and he got out some paper preparatory to wording the message when a servant appeared with a card on a tray.

He picked it up, glanced at it, and then over at his daughter. She was still leaning against the book-case, her back was turned, and her face hidden in her arms. It seemed probable to him that she was unaware of the servant's presence.

"Very good," he murmured, and motioned the man away. Again he glanced at his daughter, but she had not moved, and noiselessly, that he might not disturb her, he left the room.

Eden indeed had heard nothing. The revelation had been benumbing in its unexpectedness, and as she leaned against the book-case, an immense pity enveloped her, and she forgot her sorrow and herself. Her own distress was trivial perhaps in comparison to what her mother had suffered, and yet surely her father had repented. As she entered the house had she not told herself that for twenty years he had been faithful to a memory. So far back as she could remember, she had seen him compassionate of others, striving, it may be, through the exercise of indulgence to earn some

little of it for himself. And should she refuse it now? He had grieved; the stamp of it was on his face. She needed no one to remind her of that, and that grief perhaps had effaced the fault. And if his fault was effaceable, might not her husband's be effaceable as well? If he would but come to her and let her feel that this misstep was one that he regretted, she might yet forgive. It was as good to forgive as it was to forget; and how beautiful the future still might be!

The indignation which had glowed so fiercely subsided; one by one the sparks turned grey; the last one wavered a little and then disappeared. She turned, her sultry eyes still wet, to where her father had sat. And as she turned Mr. Menemon reëntered the room. She made no effort to account for his absence; she was all in all in her present idea, and she went forward to him at once.

"Did she forgive you?" she asked.

"Who?"

"My mother."

Mr. Menemon made no answer, but his face spoke for him.

"Then I will," she cried, and wound her arms about his neck. "I will forgive you for her."

"There is another whom you must forgive as well," he answered, gently.

"But you assured me he had done no wrong."

"Nor has he, I think." He hesitated a second. "Come down-stairs," he added; "we can discuss it better there." And taking her hand in his he led her from the room.

On reaching the parlor below, he drew the portière aside that she might pass, and then, as they say in France, he eclipsed himself. Eden entered unattended. Her father, she supposed, was following her, and she was about to address some remark to him, when before her, in the dim light of twin candelabras, she perceived her husband.

Usselex was standing bolt upright, in the position of one who has come not to render accounts, but to demand them. In his attitude there was nothing of the repentant sinner, and at sight of him Eden felt herself tricked. She turned in search of her father, but he had gone. Then, seeing herself deserted, and yet disdaining retreat, she summoned the princess air which was ever at her bidding, and crossed the room.

"Why have you left the house?" he began, abruptly.

To this Eden made no answer. She lowered the yellow shade of one candle and busied herself with another.

"Why did you leave me last night?" he continued. And as she made no reply, "Why," he asked, "why are you here?"

But still she was silent. To his questions she was dumb. It was as though she had shut some door between him and her.

"Will you not speak?" he muttered.

And then, for the first time, she looked up at him, measuring him as it were with one chill glance from head to heel. "If I remember rightly," she said, from the tips of her lips, "you left me for your mistress."

"It is false——" Usselex exclaimed. Presumably he was about to make further protest, but the portière was drawn aside and he was interrupted.

X.

As it afterwards appeared, Dugald Maule, on leaving the Usselex house the preceding evening, had gone directly to the Assembly. On arriving, he went up through the ferns to the vestiary, left his coat and hat, and while putting on his gloves, gazed down from the balcony which Lander occupies to the ball-room below.

A quadrille was in progress; a stream of willowy girls, fresh for the better part, well-dressed and exceptionally plain, were moving about the floor. They seemed serene and stupid, chattering amiably through pauses of the dance; and beneath, on the dais, Maule divined the presence of Mrs. Manhattan, Mrs. Hackensack, Mrs. Bouvery, the Coenties, and other ladies of maturer years. He was sure they were smiling and fanning themselves. They always were. And presently, when his gloves were buttoned, he fell to wondering what he was doing there. The incidents of the evening had supplied him with a quantum of thought which he had no desire to dispense in platitude. He was not at all in a mood to mingle with those whose chiefest ambition was to be ornate. In another minute he recovered his coat, and to the surprise of the door-keeper went down through the ferns again. In the memory of man no one before had ever come to a subscription-ball and deserted it two minutes later. He must be ill, Johnson reflected, and went on collecting tickets.

Maule, however, was not in any sense indisposed, and as evidence of it he walked far up Fifth Avenue, and on through the outskirts of the Park. It was his intention, self-avowed and dominant, that he would come to some decision in regard to Eden before that walk was done.

Like many another before and since, he found his brain most active when his legs were in motion. In working up a case for a client, many a time during an entire day he had reviewed dust-bound books of yellow hue, but the one point, the clinching argument that was to arrest attention and win the cause, came to him in the exhilaration of the open air. The inspiration that was to coordinate conflicting data rarely visited him at his desk. It was in the fatigue of the flesh that his mind became clairvoyant. It was then that he found the logic for his brief. And on this particular evening, as he strode along he kept telling himself that in all his practice there had been nothing to him as important as this. It was his own case that he was preparing; and did it result in failure, how could he venture to undertake one in which the interest would be feigned and the recompense coin? If he could not plead his own case and win, then might he take his shingle down.

The facts, such, at least, as they appeared to him, were evangelical in their simplicity. Here was a girl who had given him her heart's first love, a girl who had exalted him into an ideal, and then, suspecting him of infidelity to her, had married the next comer out of pique. No sooner did he have a chance of exchanging speech with her than she confessed that she hated her husband.

"Now," he reflected, "when a woman takes a man sufficiently into her confidence to admit that she hates her husband, that admission is tantamount to an avowal of love for him. Such admission she has made to me. Nothing conceivable could have been more explicit than her words." And at the memory of them he nodded sagaciously to himself. "No other girl," he continued, "no other in all the world, is as desirable as she. St. Denis would have hypothecated his aureole to possess her. As I sat with her to-night I felt mediæval from ears to heel. If our age were a century or two younger I would have carried her off to a crenelated castle, let down the draw-bridge, and defied the law. But my apartment in the Cumberland is hardly a donjon; a hansom is not a vehicle suited to an elopement; Lochinvar is out of fashion; and besides, she would not have gone. No, she would not have gone; so the other objections are immaterial. But then, there are girls who will not go at the asking, but who will come without instigation. And Eden, I take it, is one of them. It was six months before she would so much as let me touch the tips of her fingers; she was afraid of a kiss as of a bee; and at the very moment when I had given her up she threw herself in my arms: it is true, she never repeated the performance, which was a pity; though had it not been for that little affair of mine, we should in all probability be man and wife to-night. After all, it is for the best, I suppose." And again he nodded sagaciously.

"Yes," he repeated, "it is for the best. Someone—Shakspere, Martin Luther, Tupper, or Chauncey Depew—said that there were some good marriages, but none that were delicious; and I daresay that whoever said it was right. Yes, certainly it is for the best. It may be sweet and decorous, as I used to write in my copy-book, to die for one's native land; but I will be shot if it is sweet and decorous to marry for it. And practically that is what it amounts to. Men marry for the sake of others, rarely for their own, and as for women, whatever their reasons may be, *plaudite sed cavite, cives!* Eden, I am positive, married out of pique. It is nonsense to think that she could have any large affection for a man twice her age; and now that she is not only tired of him, but hates him to boot, he ought to be gentlemanly enough not to play the dog in the manger. No, it isn't that. I will admit that he is well enough in his way, provided that way is out of mine. The difficulty is that he doesn't seem to keep out of hers. Major premiss, then—Eden-hates Usselex. Minor premiss—Usselex keeps her from me. Ergo. Eliminate Usselex, and she is mine. The logic of that is admirable; the only fault with it is that it doesn't give a hint as to the manner in which Usselex is to be eliminated. He may eliminate himself, it is true; but that is a possibility that it is hardly worth while to count on. And, meanwhile, I know Eden well enough to be aware that until he does she will decline to listen to me."

Maule had reached the upper part of the Avenue. The night was chill and clear as our December nights are apt to be. There was a foretaste of snow in the air, and in that foretaste a tonic. And suddenly the cathedral loomed, huge, yet unsteeped, as though the designers had lost heart in its carcass and faith as well. The sky seemed remote and unneighborly. In the background the moon glinted in derision, and directly overhead was a splatter of callous stars.

The scene did not divert the channel of his thoughts. He walked steadily on, leaving behind him the dogma that time had fossilized and man had forgot. He was indifferent to creeds. The apathy of the stars told him nothing of worlds to which our own is unknown. In the derision of the moon he did not see the sneer of a sphere that is dead. The foretaste of snow in the air brought him no memory of the summer that had gone, and when he reached the park the leafless trees that spring would regarment left him unimpressed. The identity of birth and death, the aimlessness of all we undertake, were matters to which he had never given a thought. And had the beggar who presently accosted him been a thinker capable of explaining that life is an exhalation, that we respire, aspire, and expire, unconscious as is the tree of the futility of it all, Dugald Maule would have dismissed him with the same indifferent shrug. He was instinct with aims that end with self. His mind was centered on Eden, and until he solved the problem she had suggested, he had no thought of time that life devours or of time that devours life.

And as he tried to devise some form of campaign, suddenly he was visited by an idea which he grasped and detained. It was, that if Eden hated her husband a cause for that hatred must exist, and could he but discover it he would then have something tangible wherewith to work.

Certainly, he told himself, it could not be money; nor did Usselex look like a man that drank. "I wonder," he mused, "whether it can be that he treats her badly. H'm. I know very little about Usselex. He may be Chesterfield one hour and Sykes the next. There are plenty of men of that stamp. If he is, that poor little thing deserves consolation. No, it can hardly be that—Eden is too high-spirited to submit to brutality. She would leave him at once, and everyone would approve. Whereas, if Usselex has got himself entangled by some woman, Eden, out of sheer pride, would remain where she is. Nothing can be more galling than the pity which is manifested for a woman whose husband disports himself abroad. It is shameful, the world says; and inwardly the world thinks, when a woman wins a man and fails to hold him, the fault is not his, but hers. Eden understands that, of course, and if there is a woman in the matter, that is the reason why she continues to reside on the sunnyside of Fifth Avenue. But then, it may not be that. I may be miles away. Though if it is, nothing could be more favorable. It would be becoming of Eden to keep her misfortune to herself, but it would be unwomanly on her part not to desire revenge; and what better revenge could she have against the man whom she married out of pique than in the arms of the man by whom that pique was excited? But, bah! All this is pure conjecture. I haven't a fact to go on. I know little or nothing of Usselex, and I doubt very much whether Eden would be willing to supply me with any information. The only thing for me to do is to cull a few facts, season them to suit her taste, and serve hot. At this stage a false step would be fatal. I must be careful of my cookery. To-morrow, in the absence of facts, I will see what I can do in the way of condiments; *et alors, en route pour Cythère.*"

So mused Mr. Maule; then, having reached the end of his tether, he turned back again in the direction of his home.

The next morning, however, the plan of campaign which he had been devising was not a whit more tangible to him than it had been during his midnight stroll. He drank some coffee hopefully, and tried to lose himself in a damp copy of the *Times*. But in vain. The coffee brought him no comfort, and through the columns of the paper came the sultriness of Eden's eyes. The obituary of a famous general failed to detain his attention. The intelligence that an emperor was moribund lent no zest to the day. Mechanically his eyes scanned the Court Calendar; a case in which he was to appear was numbered therein, but he let it pass unnoticed. And presently, finding himself occupied in memorizing the advertisement of a new soap, he tossed the paper from him and started on his way down town.

It was late when he reached his office. In the corner of the room a fat little man sat patiently twirling his thumbs, and on a desk were a number of letters.

"What do you want?" Maule asked. His voice was gruff and inhospitable.

The fat little man started, and then fumbled in a pocket. "Dere was dot morhgige—" he began.

"Come again, then," Maule interrupted; "I am busy."

"Dot morhgige—" the little man persisted.

"Go to hell with your mortgage," Maule shouted, and slammed a door in his face.

This rite accomplished, he felt better. The brutality which he had displayed to the corpulent dwarf pleased him. He only regretted that the man had not insisted further, that he might have kicked him down the stairs. What was a mortgage to him, forsooth, when he had Eden for a goal? The episode, trivial though it was, had stirred his pulse and left the effect of a tonic. He smiled, and opened his letters. As he read them his clerk appeared. With him he consulted for a minute and then started for court. On his return there was the little fat man again, and beating a tattoo on the window was Reginald Maule, ex-Minister to France.

"Well, Uncle Regy," he exclaimed, "how are you? Mr. Driscoll," he called out to the clerk, "attend to that Dutch beast, will you? Uncle Regy, step this way."

He led Mr. Maule into the inner office and graciously accepted a cigar. He was in great good-humor again. While in court a luminous idea had visited him, a plan of campaign which he proposed to elaborate at his ease. It was alluring as spring, and instinct with promises of success. Already he roamed in dreams forecast.

"Dugald," the uncle began, "I did not see you at the Matriarch's, last night."

Until recently Maule had not seen his uncle for several years. But during these years the uncle had not changed. He had the same agreeable manner, the same way of seating himself, the same sarcastic fold about his lips which Maule remembered of old. Even the cut of his waistcoat was unaltered. Apparently nothing had happened to him; he had contented himself with continuing to be.

"No," the nephew answered, and flicked the ashes from his cigar. "No, something else turned up and—"

"Exactly. If I had met you there I should not have come here. Now, I want a word with you in regard to the estate. Are you busy?" And the ex-Minister settled himself in his chair with the air of a man confident that, whatever else might demand attention, his own affairs would take precedence.

Thereupon, for some little time, nephew and uncle discussed matters of personal and common

interest; and when at last these matters had been satisfactorily determined, the afternoon had begun to wane. At last the ex-Minister stood up to go.

"By the way," he said, his hand on the door, "who was it that Petrus Menemon's daughter married? I looked for her last night. When I saw her at the opera I could have sworn it was her mother. Same type, same eyes, same carriage of the head. She made me feel twenty years younger, I give you my word she did."

"She is pretty," Maule answered, negligently.

"Pretty? She is more intoxicating than the dream of a fallen angel. She is better looking than her mother. Hum, hum. You don't see such women in France. What did you say her name is?"

"She married a man named Usselex."

"Usselex? What Usselex?"

"What Usselex I can't tell you. But there seems to be only one, and she caught him. He has more money than Incoul, Jerolomon, and Bleecker Bleecker put together."

"You don't mean John Usselex, the banker?"

"Oh, but I do, though."

The ex-Minister opened the door and looked out into the outer room, then, assured that no one was listening, he resumed his former seat, crossed his legs, and meditatively beat his knee. In his face was an expression which a psychologist would have admired, a commingling of the vatic and the amused, accentuated by sarcasm.

"Well, what of it?" Maule asked shortly, perplexed at the mummery.

The ex-Minister leaned forward and for four or five minutes addressed his nephew in a monotone. As he spoke Maule's perplexity changed to surprise, then to bewilderment, and ultimately into jubilation. "Are you positive of this?" he exclaimed. "Tell me that you are. You must be positive!"

"I give you the facts—"

"I am off, then;" and he sprang from his seat. "I haven't a minute to lose," he added; and taking his uncle by the arm he led him from the office.

In the outer room the corpulent dwarf still sat. "Dere was dot morhgige—" he stammered.

"Accepted," Maule shouted, and turned to the clerk. "Look over the papers, will you? If they are right, get a check ready. As for you, my slim friend," he said to the German, "remember that business men have business hours." And laughing as though he had said something insultingly original, he hurried down the stairs, and jumping into a hansom, he presently rolled up town.

In a trifle over half an hour he was at Eden's door. "There is no time like the present," he told himself, as he rang the bell. But when, in answer to his ring, a servant appeared, he learned that Eden was not at home.

"Does Mrs. Usselex dine out, do you know?" Maule asked.

"I don't think Mrs. Usselex is coming back, sir," was the answer.

"You mean that Mrs. Usselex will not return until late, I suppose."

To this the man made no reply; he scratched the end of his nose reflectively. In his face was an expression that arrested Maule's attention.

"What do you mean?" he asked, a sudden suspicion entering his mind.

But still the man made no answer. He raised his arms, the elbows crooked, and assumed the appearance of an idiot.

"It is worth five dollars," Maule continued. "Here they are;" and with that he extended a bill of the nation, which the servant took, and then, glancing over his shoulder, whispered:

"Mrs. Usselex has gone to her father's, sir. I distrust something's hup."

"That man ought to be dismissed," Maule decided, as he hurried down the steps. "I say, cabby," he called to the hansom; "Second Avenue and Stuyvesant Square."

"Damn it all," he muttered, as he seated himself in the vehicle. "I am afraid I am late for the ball."

It took the hansom but a few minutes to reach its destination, and presently the door of Mr. Menemon's house was opened. As Maule entered he caught the sound of Eden's voice. "I want to see Mrs. Usselex," he said, and without waiting for a reply, he pushed the portière aside.

"It is false," he heard Usselex exclaim.

For a second Maule hesitated. He would have preferred to have found Eden alone. Indeed, the possibility of encountering her husband had not occurred to him; but he felt that it was too late to recede, and visited by that prescience which comes to the alert, he divined that the blow which he intended to strike must be struck then or never. He let the portière fall, and taking his

courage in both hands, he stepped forward. As he did so, Eden, in annoyance at the intrusion, moved back, and Usselex, with a query on his tongue, turned to him. But before the latter could frame his words, Maule had spoken.

"Mr. Usselex," he said, with the air of one ventilating a conventional platitude, "are you aware that a man who insults a woman is a coward?"

At this speech Eden's hands fluttered like falling leaves; she made as would she speak, but Usselex motioned to her to be silent, and flicking a speck of dust from his sleeve as though the speck represented the reproof, he answered in a tone as conventional as Maule's. "And are you aware, sir, that a man who permits himself to interfere between husband and wife is—"

But whatever he may have intended to say, the sentence remained unfinished. Maule did not wait for its completion. He advanced yet nearer to where Usselex stood, he looked him in the face, and without raising his voice, he said: "This lady, Mr. Usselex, is not your wife, nor are you her husband." Then, turning to Eden, he added with the grace of a knight-errant, "Miss Menemon, allow me to present my congratulations."

The old legends tell of disputants ossified by one glance of Jove's avenging stare; and when Maule made his melodramatic announcement, both Usselex and Eden stood transfixed and motionless with surprise. Of the little group Maule alone preserved any semblance of animation. The palms of his hands were moist, and he felt unable to control one of the muscles of his face. But his emotion was not apparent. Outwardly he was perfectly self-possessed, and admonished by that instinct which at times warns us that every trace of feeling should be disguised, he succeeded in heightening the illusion by means of his moustache, to which he proceeded to give a negligent twirl.

And as he twirled it Eden seemed to recover from her stupor. To her face, which had been blanched, the color returned. In her eyes came a gleam as from a reflection caught from without. Her lips moved, and she glanced from accuser to accused. And as she glanced, dumb and ineffectual of speech, Mr. Menemon crossed the room.

"What is it you say?" he asked.

It was evident at once that of the scene—which if long in the telling had in reality not outlasted a moment—he had stood as witness.

"What is it you say?" he repeated.

"I say that this man is a bigamist." And as Maule spoke he tossed his head as though inviting possible contradiction. "I say," he continued, "that Mr. John Usselex has a wife living in Paris."

Mr. Menemon smoothed the back of his head reflectively. "Dear me!" he said; "that may all be. I daresay there are hundreds of John Usselexes. You don't expect them to remain bachelors because one of their name-sake gets married, do you?" And with that he nodded and turned with a smile to his daughter. "He can't expect that, Eden, can he?"

But Eden's eyes were fixed on Usselex. Her attention was wholly centered in him. Seemingly her father's words were unheeded. And the old gentleman turned again to Maule.

"What evidence have you that this John Usselex is the John Usselex of whom you speak?" he asked; and with the hand with which he had smoothed the back of his head, he now began to caress his chin.

But before Maule could answer, Eden caught her father by the arm. "His face!" she whispered quickly. "You can see it in his face." She pointed to him; in her eyes was conviction, and in her voice no tremor of doubt. "Look at him," she cried; "it is he."

Usselex turned to her in a manner which to those present was uninterpretable, then his eyes sought Mr. Menemon's, and finally he lowered them to the ground. His attitude was tantamount to admission, and as such Eden construed it.

"Thank God!" she exclaimed. "O God! I thank you. I am free." She still clutched her father's arm, and Maule made a movement toward her.

"Yes," he said, as he did so, "yes, Miss Menemon——"

But before he could reach her, Usselex barred the way. "By what right, sir—" he began, very firmly, but Eden interrupted him.

"I told you once that I thought Miss Bolten was interested in him. Let me tell you now he is in love with me."

"Eden, Eden—" her father murmured, reprovingly. Into Usselex' face came an expression that a demon might have envied. For a second he fronted Maule, his hand clenched. Then the fingers loosened again. The demon was transformed into a quiet, self-possessed man, that looked like a monk, a trifle valetudinarian at that.

"Madam," he said, "when a woman speaks in that way to the man whose name she bears, there is but one thing for him to do, and that is to withdraw." He bowed, and without further comment left the room.

"I don't bear your name," Eden called after him, but he had gone. "I don't bear your name; I throw it to the mud from which it sprang."

"And you are right, Miss Menemon," Maule echoed. "You are right to do so." And again he moved to her.

"Don't touch me," the girl cried; she was trembling. Evidently the excitement had been too much for her. "Don't touch me," she repeated; and drawing from him as from a distasteful thing, she added, with a look of scorn that an insulted princess might have exhibited: "Though you have not a lackey's livery, you have a lackey's heart."

"Eden, I beg of you—" Mr. Menemon began. But the girl had turned her back, and divining the uselessness of any admonition, the old gentleman addressed himself to Maule. "You will permit me to say, sir," he continued, "that whatever your motive may have been, and whatever evidence you may have, your announcement might have been conveyed a trifle less unceremoniously. I bid you good afternoon."

"But——"

"I bid you good afternoon."

Maule twirled his moustache for a second, and then, with a glance at Eden, he too left the room.

Hardly had he gone, when Eden threw herself on a lounge. In her ears was the roar of water displaced. The flooring turned from red to black. Then all was still; she had fainted.

XI.

As Eden, through thunderclaps, and zig-zagged flames of light, groped back to consciousness again, it was with the intuition that some calamity was waiting to greet her. Into the depths of her being, a voice which refused to be hushed had been whispering, "Come." And Eden, clinging to the fringes of night, strove to still the call. But the phantom of things that were persisted and overcame her; it loomed abruptly, with arms outstretched, forcing her against her will, to reason with that in which no reason was.

For the moment she was benumbed, out-wearied with effort and enervated by the strain and depletion of force. She wished herself unconscious again, and looked back into the absence of sentiency from which she had issued, as a pilgrim reëntering the desert may recall the groves of Mekka and the silence of the Khabian tomb. It had been less a swoon to her than a foretaste of peace, the antithesis of life compressed into a second; and she longed for a repetition of the sudden suffocation of its embrace. But memory had got its baton back, and the incidents of the hour trooped before her gaze. She could not be free of them; they beat at her heart, filling her thoughts to fulfillment itself. In their onslaught they brought her new strength, the courage that comes to the oppressed; and rising from the lounge on which she had fallen, she left her father and his ministrations, and redescended into the past with anger for aigrette and hatred for spur.

It was the room that she had occupied during her girlhood to which she then went, and in the presence of the familiar walls, something reminded her of the days in which she had believed that the ignoble bore a stigma on their brow, that infamy of thought or deed left a visible sign. She recalled the old legends with which her childhood had been charmed, the combats of heroes with monsters, the struggles of lords with lies. In those days indeed, evil had been to her an abstraction, a figure of speech beckoned out of the remotest past, and unencounterable as the giant bat that darkened the nights of prehistoric time. Then had come a nearer acquaintance with it, the shudders that chronicles brought, and the intimations of the fabliaux; but still it had been distant, a belonging of the past incompetent of survival. And it was not until within recent years that she learned that it had indeed survived. Even then the tidings that reached her had as much consistency to her mind as the news of cholera in Singapore. She could not picture that Orient port, and the cholera she was sure would never attack her in her father's house.

And now suddenly she was contaminated. She felt as one may feel who had been lured into a lazar of lepers. Turn which way she might she could never wash herself clean. She was degraded in her own sight, and tricked by those whom she had trusted best. And no issue, not one. The dishonor into which she had been trapped was a thing that clamored for redress, and to that clamoring of her heart no answer was vouchsafed. "O God," she moaned, "is justice dead? Where are the thunderbolts you used to wield? Have you wearied of vengeance? have you left it, Jehovah, to us?"

Her forehead was throbbing as it had never throbbed before. Above it each individual hair seemed to be turning red. Her sultry eyes were dilated; she was quivering from shoulder to heel. And as in her restless anger she paced the room, before her on the wall glowed the device her own hands had made—*Keep Yourself Pure*. For a second she stared at it, the color mounting and retreating from her cheeks, and suddenly she tore it down and trampled it under foot.

"Vengeance is there," she cried; and without even the hesitation of a hesitation she bent over a table, and finding a sheet of paper, she scrawled across it—*In telling you of Maule's love for me I omitted to tell you of my own for Adrian*. This she addressed and then rang the bell.

And as she stood waiting for a servant to come, there was a rap on the door and her father entered. He looked at her for an instant and rubbed his hands. "It is chilly here, Eden," he said; "had you not better come down-stairs?"

"Is it worth while? It must be late. Where is Parker? has she not come with my things?"

"Yes; it is almost six o'clock. Parker—"

"Six! I thought it was midnight. How long have I been here?"

"Three or four minutes at most. I had a note to write. So soon as I could do so I followed you at once. You are quite yourself again, Eden, are you not?"

"I can understand," mused Eden, "that there are years that count double when there are moments that prolong themselves as have these." "Yes," she answered, aloud. "I am better. I will come with you."

She picked up the message she had written and left the room. In the hallway was the servant for whom she had rung. "Take this to Fifth Avenue," she said. "There is no answer, but see that it is delivered in person."

XII.

"It is pleasanter here, is it not, Eden?" Mr. Menemon asked, when they reached the sitting-room. "It makes one think of old times, doesn't it? Do you remember—" And Mr. Menemon rambled on with some anecdote of days long past.

Eden gazed at him wonderingly. His words passed her by unheeded. It was bewildering to her that he could accept the tragedy so lightly, and as he spoke she kept repeating to herself that Virginius was part of a world long dead and derided. Truly, she could not understand. He seemed conscious of no wrong doing. The position in which she was placed excited him so little that he was able to discourse in platitudes. She was not wife nor maid nor widow, and for the man who had taken her from her home and inflicted on her a wrong that merited the penitentiary, her father expressed no indignation, no sorrow even. He did not even attempt to condole with her. And it was to him she had turned. Truly, she was helpless indeed. Yet still she gazed at him, expectant of some sudden outbreak, some storm of anger which, though it parodied her own, would at least be in unison with it. Her fingers were restless and her mouth was parched, a handkerchief which she held she twisted into coils, it seemed to her that were no word of sympathy forthcoming she would suffocate, as the traveler in the desert gasps beneath the oppression of fair and purple skies.

And still Mr. Menemon rambled on. "I should have gone to his funeral," he said, "had you not come in. He is to be buried in Washington I hear. Well, well! he was a brave man and a staunch friend. Yes, he was all of that. Really, Eden, I ought to have gone. I suppose they will escort the body to the station. Did you hear the drums when you went up-stairs? It makes a man of my age feel that his turn may be next."

Mr. Menemon crossed the room and looked out of the window. "See, Eden," he continued; "there must be a whole regiment. Not his own, though. The better part of that went down at Gettysburg. You remember, don't you—"

With this Mr. Menemon turned with a haste he strove to conceal. "It's almost dinner time," he added, inconsequently. "I will just change my coat." And immediately he left the room.

For a moment Eden thought she heard his voice in the hall. Then all was still again. She was wholly alone. She envied her father's friend who lay in some catafalque across the square. And presently the sense of desolation grew so acute that she threw herself prostrate on the lounge, and clasping a cushion in her arms, she buried her face in its silk.

From the square beyond came a muffled roll, and on her shoulder the touch of a hand. It was her father, she was sure. She half turned, her cheeks wet with tears. "What is it?" she sobbed. "Father—"

"It is I, Eden." And through a rift of understanding there filtered the sound of Usselex's voice. With the flutter of a bird surprised, she looked up. She started, and would have risen, but the hand weighed her down. She tried to move, and raising her arm as though to shield her eyes from some distasteful sight, suddenly she extended it, and motioned him back.

"Eden," he began.

"Don't speak to me!" she cried; and shaking herself from his hold, she stood up and dashed the tears away. "Don't speak to me!" she repeated; "and if anywhere within the purlieus of your being there is a spark of shame, leave me, and never—"

"Eden, you are unjust."

"Ah, I am unjust, am I not? I am unjust, because I believed in you. I am unjust, because I discover you in some coarse intrigue, I am unjust, because I thought myself your wife. I am unjust, am I?"

Did you get my note? Is it for that that you are here?"

"Eden, if you will listen a moment——"

"I have listened too long. Where is my father? Why is it you pursue me here? Are you not satisfied with your work? You meet a girl who only wishes to trust, and before her eyes you unroll a panorama of deceit. Oh! you chose her well——"

"It cannot be that you believe that man, Eden——"

"The man I believed was you. What matters the testimony of others when I find myself deceived ——"

"Eden, you have deceived yourself. Last night I told you there were things I had not wished to tell, not from lack of confidence, but because——"

"Because you knew that did I hear them I would go."

"No, not that; but because I did not wish to cause you pain."

"Yes, protest. My father said you would. But the protest comes too late. Besides, I do not care to listen."

And thereat she made a movement as though to leave the room. But this Usselex prevented. He planted himself very firmly before her. His attitude was arrestive as an obelisk and uncircuitable as a labyrinth. Attention was his to command, and he claimed it with a gesture.

"You shall not go," he said; "you shall hear me."

She stepped back to elude him, but he caught her by the wrist.

"Look at me," he continued. "It took fifty years to make my hair gray; one day has made it white."

Eden succeeded in disengaging herself from his grasp, and she succeeded the more easily in that a servant unobserved by her, yet seen by Usselex, had entered the room. He loosed his hold at once and glanced at the man.

"What is it?" he asked. "No one rang."

"A letter, sir," the man answered; "it was to be delivered to you."

Usselex took the note and held it unexamined in his hand. Eden caught a glimpse of the superscription. The writing was her own. It was, she knew, the note which she had dispatched a half hour before. Meanwhile the servant had withdrawn.

"When I came home this afternoon," Usselex continued, "and found that you had gone, I could not understand——"

"You might have gone to the Ranleigh for information. Let me pass!"

"Why to the Ranleigh? surely——"

"To Mrs. Feverill, then, since you wish me to be explicit. Let me pass, I say."

"It was of her I wished to tell you——"

"Was it, indeed? You were considerate enough, however, not to do so."

"Let me tell you now?"

"Rather let me go. I prefer your reticence to your confidence."

"Eden——"

"No, I have no need to learn more of your mistress——"

Usselex stepped aside. "She is my daughter," he said, sadly. "Go, since you wish to."

—"Nor of your wife," she added, as he spoke.

"I have no other wife than you," he answered, and with the note which he held in his hand he toyed despondently. As yet he had not so much as glanced at the address.

Something, a light, an intonation, and influence undiscerned yet sentiable, stayed her steps. She halted in passing and looked him in the face. And he, seeing that she hesitated, repeated with an accent sincere as that which is heard in the voice of the moribund, "No other wife than you."

"You say that Mrs. Feverill is your daughter?" she exclaimed. It may be that the average woman, conscious of her own mobility, is more inattentive of the past than of the present. But however that may be, the assurance which Eden had just received seemed to affect her less than the preceding announcement. "You say that she is your daughter," she repeated. "Why, you told me— You said——"

"I have told you nothing. Will you sit a moment and let me tell you now?"

Coerced and magnetized, the girl moved back and sank down again on the lounge. Usselex still toyed absently with the note, and as he too found a seat, for the first time she recalled its

contents. Then a shudder beset her.

"I ought perhaps," he began, "to have been franker in this matter. But my excuse, if it be one, is that I was dissuaded by your father. Before I ventured to ask you to marry me, I told my story to him, and he counselled silence. What I say to you now he will substantiate. Shall I ring and ask him to come here?"

His words reached her from inordinate distances, across preceding days, and out of and through the note which he held in his hand; and with them came the acutest pain. "He is telling the truth," she reflected, "and I deserve to die."

"Shall I ring?" he repeated.

She started and shook her head. "No, no," she replied. "Go on."

"I thank you," Usselex returned. "I can understand that enough has occurred to shake your confidence. In the circumstances, it is good of you to be willing to receive my unsupported word. But bear with me a moment. You will see, I think, that I have done no wrong."

As he spoke she had but one thought, to repossess herself of the note. Could she but get it and tear it and set it aflame, out of the cinders life might re-arise.

"You may remember," he continued, "what I said of myself, 'things have not always been pleasant with me.' You knew as a child what it is to lose a mother, but think what it must be to have a mother and have that mother ignore your existence. Such a thing is hard, is it not? But of her I will not speak; she is dead, poor woman; I hope she never suffered as have I. The people by whom I was brought up I looked upon as my parents. They had been paid to adopt me. When I discovered that, I was old enough to make my own living. With that view I came to this country. New York was different then. I should not care to land here now and attempt to make a fortune without a penny to start with. But it is true, I was young. I was a fair linguist, a rarity in those days, and it was not long before I found a situation. When I had a little money put by, I learned of an opening in Boston, and started in business there for myself. Shortly after I became acquainted with a girl. She was very beautiful; more so, I thought, than anyone I had ever seen. So soon as I was in a position to marry she became my wife. We lived together for three years. During that time I thought her affection as unwavering as my own. She was an excellent musician, and much sought after, not alone because of her talent, but because of her beauty as well. The entertainments which she frequented I was often unable to attend. But I was glad to have her go without me. I was proud of the admiration which she aroused. One evening she left me, and did not return. For some time her disappearance was unexplained. Ultimately I discovered that she was in New York. She had deserted me for another man. I followed her and obtained a divorce. Afterwards the man deserted her as she had deserted me. Then she went abroad. Of her life there I can only judge by hearsay. I believe that at one time she figured in an opera troupe. Now and then she wrote, asking for money; but latterly she has ceased. It is a surprise to me that she calls herself by my name. Perhaps she has done so because she heard that I had prospered. The reflection of that prosperity may have been of advantage to her. That, however, can easily be stopped. But I am sorry, Eden, that you should have learned of it. Even the children do not know; they think her dead. When she deserted me, I left them with their grand-parents. In so doing I sought to separate myself from everything connected with her, and I stipulated that I would provide for their maintenance on condition that they were kept in ignorance of their mother's existence and of mine. Some years ago, however, first the grandfather, then the grandmother, died. I was obliged to appear more prominently. My daughter had married; I took her husband into my employ. It was of him I spoke the other day."

He hesitated and paused, his eyes fixed in hers. The phrases had come from him haltingly, one by one, but each he had dowered with an accent that carried conviction with it. With the note which he held in his hand, he still toyed abstractedly.

"You understand now, do you not?" he asked. "You understand and forgive?"

And Eden, as one who has weathered a storm and sees shipwreck imminent in port bowed her head. "It is truth," she told herself. "If he reads that note, he will kill me."

"You understand now, do you not?" he repeated. His voice was sonorous and caressing as an anthem, and he bent nearer that he might see her face.

"Too late!" she answered.

"No, Eden, not that. Look at me. You must not hide your eyes. In all the world there are none as fair as they. Look at me, Eden. Tell me that you forgive. I have pained you, I know; I have been stupid; but the pain has been unwitting and the stupidity born of love. Look at me, Eden. See," he continued, and bent at her side, "See, I ask forgiveness on my knees. Can you not give it me?"

"To you, yes, but never to myself." She spoke hoarsely, in a voice unlike her own; her eyes were not in his, they were staring at something in his hand, and as she stared, she seemed to shrink. The muscles of her face were rigid. And Usselex, perplexed at the fixidity of her gaze, followed the direction which her eyes had taken and saw that they rested on the note which he still held, crumpled and forgotten. For a second he looked at it wonderingly, "Why, it is from you," he exclaimed.

In that second, Eden, with the prescience that is said to visit those that drown, went forward and

back, into the past and into the future as well. Amid her scattered yesterdays she groped for a promise. Of the unanswering morrows she called for release, and as her husband stood up, preparing to read what she had written, she felt herself the depository of shame.

The next instant she was at his side. "Give it me," she murmured. Her voice trembled a little, but she strove to render it assured. "Give it me," she pleaded.

Usselex turned to her at once. "Certainly, if you wish it," he said. "What is it about?"

He held the note to her, and she, with an affected air of indifference, took it from him and tossed it into the grate.

"Nothing," she answered, and then, as though ashamed of the falsehood, she looked him bravely in the face. "It was about your clerk."

"Adrian?" he asked. And as she nodded, tremulous still and unprepared for further questions, he added, "I hope you like him."

"You hope I like him?"

"Yes, he is my son."

Eden's hands went to her throat and her eyes to the grate. The note was already in a blaze.

"Yes," Usselex continued, "I have a bit of news for you. He is engaged to Miss Bolton. For a long time her parents objected, but last night they consented. It may be because he was at the opera with you. How small people can be!" he added. "She is a nice girl, though. Adrian told me this morning that he tried to speak to you about her the night I dined with Governor Blanchford, but that you did not seem interested."

"God in Heaven!" gasped Eden, beneath her breath. "If these are your punishments, what then are your rewards?"

Usselex had led her to a seat and taken her unresisting hand in his. For some little time he talked to her, very gently, as it behooves the strong to address the weak. And as he spoke, Mr. Menemon entered, and seeing them hand-locked and side-by-side, he smiled cheerily to himself with the air of a man who learns that all is well.

Usselex stood up at once, but for a little space Eden sat very still, surprised as February at a violet, then rising, she went forward to the window and looked out at the night. From the square beyond came the beat of drums, and on the breeze was borne to her the shrill treble of retreating fifes. And as she loitered at the window, conscious only of a sense of happiness such as she had never known before, her father called to her. She turned at his bidding. In the opposite doorway a servant stood.

"Dinner is served," he said.

And presently Mr. Menemon, as was his custom, mumbled a grace and thanksgiving to God.

THE END.

[1] The reader is referred to *The truth about Tristrem Varick*.

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